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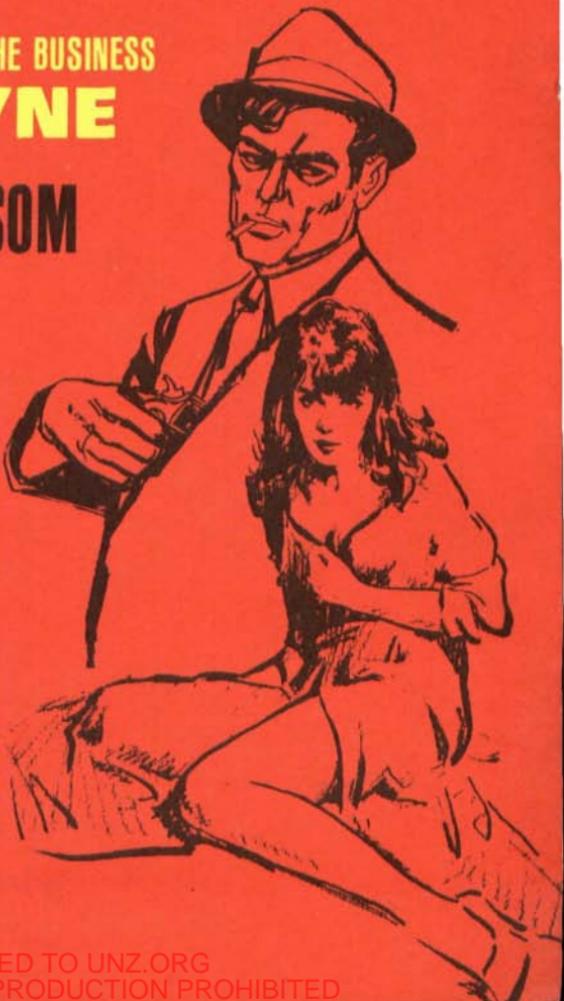
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MIKE SHAYNE

MYSTERY MAGAZINE



SEPTEMBER, 1967

VOL. 21, NO. 4

NEW MIKE SHAYNE SHORT NOVEL DEATH IS MY RANSOM

by BRETT HALLIDAY

The call came in the night. "Mike Shayne?" the muffled voice said. "We've got your broad. Do like we tell you—and you may see her alive." Yes, they had kidnaped Lucy Hamilton—and her ransom price was death!

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LEO MARGULIES

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Featuring

MIKE SHAYNE



DEATH IS MY RANSOM

*Mike Shayne faced his toughest
foes. Lucy had been kidnaped—
(and death was the ransom price.)*

by BRETT HALLIDAY



MIKE SHAYNE called into his office at eight o'clock that night. Shayne was on a job for a woman whose son was accused of complicity in six juvenile robberies. The woman said the boy was innocent. The boy sneered. Shayne was on the weary round of finding out.

"I'll go straight home, Angel," Shayne said from the pay booth. "Close up shop for the night and go home yourself."

"All right, Michael," the brown-

eyed girl said. "The district attorney wants to see you in the morning."

"Sure, Angel, but tonight I sleep."

"Don't forget to eat something, Michael," his secretary said.

After Shayne had hung up, Lucy Hamilton filed her work for the day, straightened the office, checked to be sure all was in order for the morning, and freshened her make-up. Then she clicked her bag shut firmly, and left the office. She

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put out the lights and locked the outer door behind her.

Her heels clicked firmly along the deserted corridor of the Flagler Street building. She rode down in the elevator, and crossed the echoing lobby. She walked along the crowded street in the evening twilight to the garage where her car was parked.

"Evening, Miss Hamilton," the attendent said.

"Good evening, Paul."

"You working late again," Paul said. "I guess you're heading straight home."

"You guess right," Lucy said, smiling.

She drove out of the garage and turned toward her apartment. She drove easily, relaxing after the long day. She was tired, but she smiled. Lucy liked her work, no matter how hard it was, or how late she had to work for Shayne. It was more than a job to Lucy.

She turned into her quiet street. She was thinking about the good dinner she was going to prepare for herself, the one, perhaps two, cocktails before, and then a quiet night with a good book and early bed.

Briefly she frowned when she thought about Mike Shayne. She hoped that the big redhead would have the sense to eat, and that he would not work too late on the job. It was a thankless job her boss had now—guilty or innocent, the boy Shayne was trying to help was a

young punk. And the mother wasn't much better—a spoiled widow, no better than she should be, who had ruined her son and now wanted Shayne to save him.

With all this in her mind, Lucy failed to see the car that turned into the quiet street behind her. She had just begun to slow to make the turn into the garage beneath her building, when the blue car behind her suddenly speeded up, passed, and cut in.

Lucy Hamilton jammed on her brakes.

The blue car had cut her off.

Her body hurled forward; her head grazed the windshield. Luckily she had been driving slow, already about to turn into the ramp down to the garage. She sat, unhurt but shaken, behind the steering wheel. A man was getting out of the car ahead.

Then the anger swelled up in Lucy. She jumped out of her car and walked in a fury toward the blue car and the man who had emerged from it. As she neared the car, where the man stood at the rear as if waiting for her, another man got out of the blue car.

Neither of them seemed disturbed or upset.

They moved smiling toward her, one beginning to speak as if apologizing.

"What do you think—" Lucy began, furious, and then she stopped.

She saw their faces. She suddenly remembered what had really

happened—they had cut in front of her. She saw that they were neither angry, nor shaken, nor really apologetic.

She turned to run.

The two men leaped. One grabbed her arms. She opened her mouth to scream. The second man clamped his hand over her mouth. She struggled in their grip. She kicked one in the shin with her sharp heel.

The man grunted, swore, but did not let go.

They had her securely now, and began to drag her toward the blue car. She fought, but it was no use.

They pushed her into the car.

Inside the car a third man held her.

One man got behind the wheel, the second joined the third man in the back seat with her.

They drove off.

They had not spoken a word.

II

THE RINGING seemed to be far away—somewhere far down the lovely valley where Mike Shayne stood in the sun with his fishing rod in his hand, and—Shayne woke up.

The telephone was ringing insistently.

Shayne looked at the luminous dial of the clock on his bed table. It read three o'clock in the morning. Shayne swore. The switchboard man knew better than to put



a call through to Shayne at such an hour, unless—

Shayne sighed, sat up, reached for a cigarette, cradled the receiver on his shoulder.

"Shayne," he grunted.

"Mr. Shayne?" the voice of Pete on the switchboard said. "I wouldn't bother you, but this call sounds urgent."

Shayne snapped a match-light on his thumbnail, lit the cigarette.

"Okay, Pete. Put it through."

There was a brief silence, then, "Shayne?"

The voice was muffled, thick and gruff. A handkerchief over the mouthpiece, Shayne knew instantly. But he could sense the deep, hard voice beneath the muffled sound.

"Yes," the redhead said.

The voice rasped under the muffle. "Listen, and listen good, peeper. I'm gonna say it just once. We've got your secretary. And we ain't—"

"Lucy?" Mike Shayne snapped.
"You've—"

"I said listen, shamus," the voice snarled, "and I mean listen. You want to see her again?"

Shayne blew smoke, took a tight grip on himself.

"Go ahead," he said tightly.

"Swell," the voice said, rasped. "We've got your Lucy. She's okay. We want a little favor. No money, just a favor. Sit tight and we'll call again."

"How do I know—" Shayne began.

There was a silence, then a new voice. "Michael? They grabbed me as—"

The phone went dead. Shayne stared at it for a long time. It had been Lucy's voice. Still—

Shayne took a deep breath. All right, someone had Lucy. Why? A ransom. A favor, not money. All right, that figured. He stubbed out his cigarette and lit another. He had advised enough people not to panic in his day.

He swung his legs over the edge of the bed, his mind working on two levels at once. First, what did they want? Which of his three present cases were they concerned with, if it were one of his present cases?

On the second level he considered what to do instantly. He knew that. He had told enough people that too. He reached for the telephone again.

"Pete? Get me the police. No, Gentry's office."

Shayne smoked, waited.

A sleepy voice answered. "Office of the chief."

"Who's this?" Shayne said. "Mike Shayne here."

"Mr. Shayne?" the sleepy voice said. "This is Sergeant Banner. The chief's at home."

"I've got to talk to him, Banner," Shayne snapped.

"At this hour? I don't dare, Mr. Shayne. He'd have my head. Even the Mayor—"

"It's a kidnaping, Banner. My secretary."

There was a silence. Then Sergeant Banner's voice had come fully awake.

"Miss Hamilton? Hold on."

There were noises on the line.

"Okay, Mr. Shayne. You're through on the direct tie-line."

Shayne waited, smoked. Already the familiar sense of endless waiting that was the tense atmosphere of a kidnaping was beginning to envelop him. The sense of each second being an hour as a man could do nothing but wait for some mocking voice to call again in its own diabolical time.

"Who the hell—" the gruff voice of Chief Will Gentry of the Miami police began.

Shayne cut off his old friend.
"It's Mike, Will, I've—"

"Mike? Shayne?" Gentry's voice said, began to rise to a slow roar. "What the devil do—"

"Lucy's been kidnaped, Will," Shayne said.

"I don't care what—"

Shayne could almost see the eyes of the chief widening under the heavy black brows. He could see Gentry sitting bolt upright in bed, perhaps reaching for the stub of black cigar that was never far from his hand.

"Kidnaped? Lucy?" Gentry's harsh voice said.

Shayne heard the grim, almost solemn undertone. The most dreaded word in the policeman's vocabulary—kidnaping. The dirtiest, saddest, most difficult of crimes. No matter what happened in a kidnaping no one was ever the same again. The one crime where the criminal held all the cards, where there was no sure and proper way to operate. Each case was different. Any move, right or wrong, could be fatal.

"Okay, Mike," Gentry's now alert voice said. "What's the picture?"

Shayne told the Chief the little he knew. "They want me, of course. Pressure on me for some favor."

"Yeh," Gentry said. "They didn't say what they want?"

"Not yet," Shayne said. "They'll contact me later. The

usual pattern, Will. Let me sweat it out for a time. The cat-and-mouse routine. Probably a couple of more calls before they get to the point, just to soften me up."

"You want the FBI?"

Shayne considered. "Not yet. This isn't a real kidnap, you know? Just an extortion on me. No ransom in money, no contact or delivery. They'll just tell me what to do, and supposedly let Lucy go when it's done."

"All right," Gentry said. "We'll keep it to us for now. Can you figure what you could do for someone that would be final enough to use this kind of pressure? I mean, it has to be some act you can't go back on later, Mike."

"I know," Shayne said. "I'm thinking. Meanwhile, you better bring a tap for my telephone, set up tracing procedure. Put out the full alert for Lucy with her description."

"I'll give it the works, Mike," Gentry's gruff voice said. "What about the papers?"

"It's not a regular snatch, as I said," Shayne said. "But I'll bring Tim Rourke in. He'll handle the other reporters if they get wind of it. They probably won't be interested; no real human interest, like in a child snatching."

"No," Gentry said.

Shayne swore. "They didn't even tell me not to call in the police."

"No reason to, Mike. Like you

said, no contact or delivery. It's an outright pressure play. We'll have nothing to trip them on. The police can't really hurt them unless we can find her."

"Then we'll have to find her," Shayne said grimly.

"Or give them what they want," Gentry said, equally grim.

"Let's cross that bridge when we find out what they want," Shayne said. "Let's see if we can find a lead first. Maybe they're professionals, and your informers may tell you something. Meanwhile, I'll check her route, see if I can find where they grabbed her, and if they left any clues."

There was a brief silence on the other end of the line. Gentry's heavy breathing could be heard, the quick and sharp puff on his perennial black cigar.

"It's a hundred-to one against finding them before they make their demand, Mike," Gentry said. "You know that."

"I know, Will," Shayne said, "but I can't just sit. I've got to do something. Keep busy. Anything."

"Sure, Mike, I'll get the wheels turning," Gentry said.

Shayne hung up and sat for some time staring into the faint grey light of the dawn beyond his window. Lucy was in deep danger because she worked for him, Shayne. Her life in danger because of him. And he was helpless. That was a kidnaping. The victim innocent, and the police helpless, and in the

middle the terrified target with the money.

Only this time it was not money —which made it, perhaps better, or, perhaps worse. They wanted something, and if they got it they would probably let Lucy go. But what if what they wanted could not be done? There was no way of knowing if what they had in mind was impossible except in their minds.

"Move!" Shayne suddenly said aloud.

He stood up, stubbed out his cigarette, and began to dress. He neither shaved nor showered. Somehow he could not bring himself to do those simple, routine actions. Dressed, he checked his automatic, sensing the fury inside him that itched to use the gun, clapped his panama on his head, and went out.

He went down to the garage beneath his building and got into his car. He drove out into the still and silent faint grey of the Miami dawn. The whole city seemed to be waiting... waiting.

Shayne drove toward his office. Maybe they had left some trail for him to follow, made some mistake. Anything.

III

MIKE SHAYNE stood inside the outer door of his office, and a cold hand seemed to grip his stomach.

The office was so deserted, so

silent. A neat and cold office without the pert brown eyes of the human presence that gave it life each morning when Shayne strode in. As if a great, cold space had been left in the dim air, an emptiness so real Shayne could feel it almost physically.

Shayne shook his head, swore at himself for a sentimental fool, and walked across the deserted outer office to the door of his inner office. It was still locked. Lucy, then, had locked it before she left. Which almost certainly meant that she had not been captured inside the office.

To be sure, and because sentiment would do no good and work was what he needed, he checked the office carefully anyway. He found nothing unusual or suspicious. He sat down at Lucy's neat desk and picked up the telephone. He dialed the number of the *Miami Daily News* and asked for Tim Rourke.

"Rourke," the voice of his reporter friend said.

"Mike, Tim," Shayne said. "Are you busy?"

"As usual, Mike," the lean reporter said. "But if it's important—"

"Lucy's been kidnaped, Tim," Shayne said softly.

He sensed the stunned silence on the other end of the line. Then Rourke spoke, his voice high, cracked.

"Why would anyone—"

"Pressure on me," Shayne said.



LUCY HAMILTON

"Can you get over to the office? I guess I could use company."

"On my way," Rourke said. "You want it quiet, Mike?"

"If you can keep it quiet for now."

"We can, and I'll talk to the other boys," Rourke said. "I'm on my way."

Shayne lit a cigarette in his silent office. But he could not just wait. He locked up again, and began to walk slowly along the dim dawn corridor of the office building. His grey eyes studied every inch of the floor and walls all the

way to the bank of elevators. He found nothing. There were no marks of a struggle anywhere.

Shayne pressed the elevator button, and examined the elevator when it came up. He examined each elevator, and, on the last one, rode down to the lobby. He had found nothing that meant anything in any of the elevators.

In the lobby he paused. The maintenance crew was at work on the final morning mop to make the marble floors sparkle for the influx expected to begin within an hour. The night checker on the door nodded a greeting to Shayne.

"Were you on when Lucy left last night, Joe?" Shayne asked.

"No, she must have left before I got on," the checker said.

"Did you notice anything strange in the lobby when you came on? Signs of a struggle?"

"No, nothing, Mr. Shayne. The cleaners would have told me if there was anything."

Shayne nodded. He looked around the lobby as if not quite sure what to do next. It was getting to him, the effect of being involved in a kidnaping. Then he saw Rourke come in. The elongated reporter was walking fast.

"The boys will keep it under wraps as long as you say, Mike," Rourke said. He studied Shayne's face. "Anything happen?"

"No, but I better check my answering service and my hotel," Shayne said. "I guess I forgot."

Shayne went to the pay telephone in the lobby. He called his answering service. He called the switchboard at his apartment-hotel. There was no message. He returned to Rourke.

"Come on," Shayne said.

The two men left the lobby of the Flagler Street building, and Mike Shayne turned left toward the garage that Lucy always used. His grey eyes scanned the deserted morning streets as they walked. At the garage the sleepy attendant came out to greet the detective.

"Mornin', Mr. Shayne. You're early today."

"Hello, Paul," Shayne said. "Did Lucy park here last night?"

"Like always," Paul said. "She was late, too. I mean, late pickin' up the car."

"Did you notice anything unusual?"

"Unusual? No, not that I remember, Mr. Shayne."

"No one hanging around?"

Paul frowned. "No, but there's always people hanging around here, you know? I mean, maybe I seen some guys, but I ain't sure."

"Did Lucy say anything?"

"Only that she was goin' straight home."

Mike Shayne nodded. "Thanks, Paul."

The redhead and Tim Rourke walked back to Shayne's car. The lean reporter watched the detective. Shayne's face was grim and pale.

"Take it easy, Mike," Rourke said.

"Sure, Tim," Shayne said. "It's me they want, you understand? Me! But it's Lucy who is in danger. If they want me why didn't they attack me?"

"I know, Mike," Rourke said.

In Shayne's car the two men lapsed into silence, each with his own thoughts, as Shayne drove the route he knew Lucy took each night as regular as clockwork. Made to order for an abductor, Shayne thought bitterly.

Shayne drove slowly, his sharp eyes observing the route. But he saw nothing in the early morning of the city until he turned into the quiet street where Lucy lived. He saw the car instantly.

"Her car," Shayne said, nodded ahead.

"It looks like she was about to turn into the garage," Rourke said.

"And was cut off," Shayne said. "Look at the way it's nosed into the curb. She hit her brakes and skidded toward the curb. There are tire marks up ahead from another car."

Shayne parked directly behind Lucy's empty car, and the two men got out and walked carefully toward Lucy's car. Shayne studied the ground as he approached his secretary's abandoned vehicle. He saw nothing on the macadam of the street.

At the car the two men leaned

in and searched and found nothing. Shayne straightened up and rubbed his gaunt jaw.

"Her handbag is gone. That looks like she got out by herself," the detective said. "She probably thought some lousy driver had almost hit her, and got out to give him a piece of her mind." Shayne smiled. "You know Lucy."

Rourke nodded. "And she walked right into a trap. It looks like they planned it pretty well, Mike. Pros?"

"Probably," Shayne agreed. "They moved fast and they didn't make a mistake, as far as I can see. They must have known her route pretty well. This is a quiet street."

"There's nothing at all for a clue," Rourke said. "Just her car."

An empty early morning street. Nothing but an abandoned car, mute testimony to the danger Lucy was now in.

"Should we look at her apartment?" Rourke said.

"No point," Shayne said bluntly. "She never got there, Tim. They grabbed her here. They did it smoothly, and they've got her. Damn it, Tim, what do they want?"

"What do you have, Mike?" the reporter said. "I mean, what can you do for them?"

"How the devil do I know? It could be one of the cases I'm on now, it probably is. But it could also be a half a dozen cases from the past. If I just had an idea!"

"Easy," Rourke said again.

The lean reporter watched his friend. Rourke's face showed how concerned the reporter was for Mike Shayne. But Shayne suddenly took a deep breath, shivered through his massive frame.

"You're right, Tim. Yelling gets me nowhere. All right. I've got to think while I'm waiting. They'll tell me soon enough what they want, but if I could get an idea before they do, maybe I could get something in motion."

"What are you doing to do?"

"Go back to the office. I should be there anyway. I just wanted to see if I could find a mistake first."

"What do you want me to do?"

"Just keep your ears open, and keep it out of the papers," Shayne said.

"Okay, Mike," Rourke said. "Don't worry. Gentry'll find her."

"Yeh, we'll all find her," Shayne said. "But alive or dead?"

The lean reporter had no answer. He knew as well as Shayne how many kidnap victims are found floating in a lake or at the bottom of some ditch.

Shayne drove them back to the Flagler Street building. The reporter took his car and drove away. Shayne went up to his office.

IV

AN HOUR LATER Mike Shayne sat back in the desk chair of his private office and pushed the files

in front of him away. The redhead stared out the window at the bright sun that rested on the sprawling city of Miami.

Nothing.

The silence of the office was beginning to get to him. Nothing underlined the absence of Lucy Hamilton as much as the deadly silence. Three times the telephone rang, and each time Shayne had waited for Lucy to answer.

A reflex action. And each time he answered at last his stomach sank again with the knowledge of Lucy's danger. The brown-eyed girl had made herself so important in Shayne's life that every action he did reminded him of her abduction.

Shayne smoked. After a time he turned back and looked at the files on his desk again. Three cases, that was all he had at the moment—and each one drew a blank.

The case of the juvenile Dillinger was open and shut—either the young punk was involved in the robberies or he wasn't. The police had the boy. The widow's only hope was that Shayne find some proof that the boy was innocent. There was nothing in the case that could be changed by pressure on Shayne. The police already considered the boy guilty. They would need real proof to change their minds, not pressure.

The case of the socialite husband who made too many "trips" with his secretary was no case at all.

Nothing but a paranoid wife. The socialite was as innocent as a lamb. The trips were real, the secretary had a husband she loved, and there wasn't a hint of suspicion except in the sick mind of his client. He was about to close the case. There was no area of pressure in it.

The third case was a simple insurance job—the investigation of a burglary in which he was empowered to pay to get back the loot, no questions asked. No inside job, and the police were after the thieves. No pressure on him could change this case either.

Shayne smoked, waited, and thought in the deadly silence of the office. Twice Will Gentry called to report that everything possible was being done, and that there were no results yet. Even Gentry's informers knew nothing. The city was being carefully combed, but so far nothing.

"Thanks, Will," Shayne said. "No one could do more."

"Every man on my force has Lucy's picture burned into his brain, and is on the lookout for any hint," Gentry said. "What have you come up with?"

"Nothing."

"And no contact yet?"

"No contact," Shayne said.

What did they want? Why didn't they call? They said it wasn't money, but what the devil was it? The waiting, that was the killer in a kidnaping.

Shayne went back to work. He

examined all his recent cases, and all his past cases for five years to see if any of them could involve some action of his that could be forced to change a result. After another hour he came up with one thin file. He looked at it for a long time.

It was a case closed six months ago; a murder case. Shayne had been the one who tracked down young Jerry Sanders and dug up the evidence that convicted the young man of the murder of his friend in a youth club. Shayne's testimony had weighed heavily in the conviction.

Now a clemency hearing was due to determine if young Sanders would go to the electric chair or have his sentence commuted. There was also a motion for a new trial on the grounds that the first degree charge had been in error. Shayne's testimony could affect both matters, perhaps get young Sanders both a commutation and, later, a reduced sentence.

It was possible that if Shayne said that he thought the boy had not really planned the murder, a point that had never been clear, maybe Sanders would get a reduction. Yet Shayne had already made it known to the Governor that he did think that Sanders had not planned the murder.

Only maybe someone did not know that.

Then Shayne swore softly. Young Sanders came from a sim-

ple lower middle-class family with no money to speak of. Shayne could not imagine them either thinking-up such a scheme to pressure him, nor having the money to pay kidnapers. Men who risked a kidnaping charge did not come cheap.

Shayne lit another cigarette. He felt helpless. Nothing he had thought of yet seemed to help at all. And somewhere some ruthless men had Lucy! If he ever got his hands—

The ringing of the telephone stopped his thought. The red-head licked his dry lips, and picked up the receiver slowly.

"Shayne," he said, and his voice cracked as it had each time he had answered the telephone, his stomach sinking.

"Mike? It's Tim. I had a call!"

"A call?" Shayne said.

"About Lucy, Mike."

Shayne rubbed his chin. "They called you? Why would they call you when—"

"No, Mike, not them, not the kidnapers," Rourke said rapidly. The reporter sounded eager. "A call from some informer. No name, you know the type. He said he had information on Lucy if I wanted it. He said he knew I was a friend of yours, and that he didn't like kidnapers."

Shayne tugged on his ear. "Go on, Tim."

"It was about ten minutes ago. A man, voice muffled. He told me

that he had definite information that Lucy had been taken to Los Angeles. He said he'd seen her. He didn't call her Lucy, of course, Mike. He said I was to tell Shayne that his woman was on her way to Los Angeles.

Shayne swore. "A crank, Tim. They come around a kidnaping like locusts. They crawl out of the woodwork."

"But no one knows Lucy's been abducted, Mike," Tim said.

"They probably do in the criminal world, Tim," Shayne said. "I can't act on a tip like that. It's a thousand to one it's just a crank. Maybe someone with a grudge against me who just wants me on a wild-goose chase. No, I—"

Rourke broke in. "Mike, I don't think this was any crank. He sounded too scared. And, Mike, what was Lucy wearing?"

"Wearing?" Shayne tried to think. His mind worked to picture his secretary as he had last seen her yesterday. "A grey dress, pale blue blouse, grey high heels, and a pale blue bag."

"That was exactly how he described her, Mike," Rourke said quietly. "He said that was what she was wearing when she was put onto a plane! Except that he added a star-shaped silver pin on her grey jumper—jumper, not dress."

Shayne was silent for a long minute. He saw Lucy in his mind, and he saw the silver pin. He also realized that the grey dress had in-

deed been a jumper, or why would she have had a blouse on, too?

"All right," Shayne said. "He knows what she was wearing. He could have seen that at any time yesterday. It doesn't prove a damn."

"All right, Mike," Rourke said, "but if Lucy wanted to send you a message what would she say about last night?"

"Last night?" Shayne said.

"Was the last thing she said to you last night, 'Don't forget to eat something, Michael?' Was that what she said on the phone? The last words, exactly?"

Shayne did not breathe for a moment. He could hear the voice of his brown-eyed secretary as she said those exact words on the phone last night. Then this caller, the tipster, had talked to Lucy, and after Shayne had last night.

"Okay, Tim, he's seen her. Did he say why they would take her to Los Angeles?"

"He said they know how close you are to Will Gentry, and how dangerous it would be to hold her long here. And, Mike, he said that they would not contact you until they had her safe in Los Angeles. Have they called you yet?"

"No, Tim, not yet," Shayne said.

Why hadn't they called him? Why wait so long? Tim had come up with a possible answer, and there was no doubt that the unknown tipster had really been close



TIM ROURKE

to Lucy and recently. It smelled bad, but could he afford to overlook it? Gentry would keep working in Miami.

"Okay, Tim, I'm going to Los Angeles. I know men on the force out there. I—"

"I'm ahead of you, Mike. I've already booked us two seats on the next jet out. I'm going, Mike. You need someone with you, and I can help keep the Los Angeles papers quiet."

Shayne nodded. "Okay, Tim. I'll meet you at the airport."

The redhead hung up. Then he picked up the receiver again and called his switchboard and his answering service. He gave them the number of a hotel in Los Angeles where they could call him the moment they got a call of any kind.

In most kidnaping cases, a man would stay close to his phone, but

in this case they wanted Shayne, and Shayne only, and they would wait.

He called Gentry and explained what had happened.

Then he checked his automatic, clapped his panama on his shock of red hair, and went out and down to his car to drive to the airport and the flight to Los Angeles.

V

THE GREAT JET flew high and steady, and above Grand Canyon Mike Shayne looked down. The massive cut in the land was spread out and beautiful below. It would not be long before they reached Los Angeles.

Shayne had already had Gentry teletype ahead with the details of the case. Los Angeles had promised full cooperation and secrecy. A Captain De Jong, a man Shayne knew, would meet the jet. There was nothing more Shayne could do now. He was not optimistic—Los Angeles was a big city, and finding Lucy would be looking for a needle in a haystack.

The redhead watched the great canyon pass away behind. In a way, though, the move to Los Angeles would help him and the police. At least now they had a lead, the arrival of the other plane in Los Angeles. It was possible that someone might have seen a woman of Lucy's description, possible even that Lucy could have indi-

cated to some witness that she needed help.

Shayne shook his head. The kidnapers had taken a big risk in moving Lucy, especially on a public carrier. It was an unnecessary risk, when—

Mike Shayne stopped.

His grey eyes narrowed into the hardest of steel points.

Something was wrong.

It had smalled bad all along.

Why would the kidnapers take such a stupid and unnecessary risk? Just to avoid the Miami police? They must know that the Los Angeles police would work just as hard. Why leave one city where they were safely hidden, to risk the exposure and accidents of a trip to another city?

Not a bad risk, to go to Los Angeles, but an unnecessary risk!

Shayne tugged hard on his left earlobe. A hunch was slowly growing in his mind.

The tipster called, a man who had obviously been close to Lucy since she had been abducted. Why not one of the gang?

No contact had been made since the initial call. Why? If they wanted something from Shayne, what were they waiting for?

None of his cases, except the remote possibility of the Sanders matter, contained anything he could affect, no matter what the pressure on him.

And now the unnecessary risk of taking Lucy to Los Angeles.

No, it stank. And yet, they had kidnaped Lucy, so they wanted something from him.

What?

Perhaps something in a crime that had not yet happened!!

Shayne rubbed his gaunt jaw and watched the desert land flying past below the great jet. His grey eyes burned with a sudden fire. A hunch, yes, but that was what police work came down to a great deal of the time.

A simple hunch that what the kidnapers really wanted was only one thing—to get Mike Shayne out of Miami!

But why? Why such a risk as a kidnaping just to get him out of town? He was a good detective, but not that good. No one was that good, unless—

The raw-boned detective thought about the retainer contracts he had. There were only three: two insurance companies, and a large New York detective agency who retained him to do any work they needed in the Miami area or the South.

Because if they went to such lengths to keep him out of town, then they had to know that he would be in the case automatically. Which meant one of his retainers. And they also had to fear him very much.

Shayne felt cold. What if he was wrong? If Lucy were in Los Angeles? The kidnapers could have been simply stupid. Men who kid-

naped usually were; it was a stupid type of crime.

Yet, Shayne felt his hunch. He was sure. And, in the last analysis, what good could he do in Los Angeles anyway?

"Tim?" Shayne said quietly.

The reporter looked at him.

"I've got a hunch, Tim," Shayne said. He explained quickly.

Rourke stared at him.

"You're sure?" Rourke said.

"No," Shayne said, "but I'm going to take the chance. I have to. We've got to get a lead on Lucy. Now listen. You stay here, be seen, work around with the Los Angeles police. I'll go with you as far as Headquarters. I expect they've got a man watching, if my hunch is right."

"When we get to Headquarters I'll try a disguise. I'm not easy to hide, but I'll do something. Then I'll get the police to fly me to Las Vegas in a police plane. I'll get the jet for Miami from Vegas. I won't even get in touch with Gentry until I get back to Miami. If they have a man here, they'll figure it out after a while, but I should get a day's start anyway. If it all goes well, I'll be in Miami by midnight."

"All right, Mike, if you really think—"

"It's all I've got, Tim. If I'm wrong, you and the Los Angeles police can do all I can."

Neither man spoke again until the great jet circled out over the blue Pacific and swooped in for a

landing at Los Angeles International Airport.

The Los Angeles police were waiting at the end of the moving sidewalk inside the main terminal building. Shayne watched everyone and everything all the way from the jet to the police, but he saw nothing and no one.

"Hello, Mike," Captain De Jong said. "Sorry, but we'll do our best. I've got my men checking all air arrivals, even private planes."

Shayne nodded, and said nothing about his hunch until they were safely in a police car. Then he leaned forward and explained it to De Jong. The captain was dubious.

"It's a hell of a chance just to get you away," De Jong said.

"I know, but maybe someone needed me away very badly," Shayne said, "which means that I've got to get back because if it's that important I ought to spot it as soon as anything happens. And if I'm right, that's my lead to Lucy."

The captain agreed to Shayne's plan, and when they all reached the courthouse, Shayne went into the private office of De Jong with a police disguise expert.

A HALF HOUR later three uniformed Los Angeles policemen walked casually out of the Courthouse and into a waiting prowler car. One of the policeman was tall and gaunt, but instead of red hair his was black, and dark glasses covered most of his upper face. His

nose was straight, and he looked every inch a policeman.

Behind the wrap-around pilot-style dark glasses Shayne watched carefully, but he saw no one who seemed to be even close enough to be interested in him. At the airport again he walked quickly to a small police plane. Moments later the plane took off.

Later that night anyone watching the Las Vegas airport would have seen a tall, dark-haired, aquiline-featured man in dark glasses board the Miami-bound jet. But Shayne was sure that there was no one watching.

It was just after midnight when the jet touched down in Miami, the city itself a blaze of light in the night. Midnight was not a late hour for Miami. But there were few people at the airport to greet the jet, one of the last arrivals for the night, and Shayne walked carefully in the shadows.

He did not take his car, which was parked in the parking lot, but waited until he was sure no one was observing, and then caught a taxi. He directed the driver to a medium-priced transient hotel in the heart of the city.

In the hotel he checked in under a fake name and went up to his room. Once in the room he sent down to room service for a bottle of Martel. The cognac came. He tipped the waiter, and closed the door. He poured four fingers of the good brandy, and picked up the

telephone. He got an outside line and dialed Will Gentry's private number.

The chief was there, and that made Shayne feel good. Will Gentry was staying on the job where Lucy was concerned.

"Will?" Shayne said quietly.

"Mike! Where are you?"

"In Miami, Will. I came back."

There was a silence. Then the gruff voice of the Chief of Police said, "You found her?"

"No, Will, I didn't even look. I'm in the St. Peter's Hotel. I'm not supposed to be back. Can you come here? Room fourteen twelve. I don't want anyone to know I'm back."

"I'll be there in ten minutes, Mike."

Shayne hung up, took a long drink of the fine cognac, and stared thoughtfully at the far wall of the hotel room.

He hoped his hunch was a good one.

VI

WILL GENTRY appeared at the door ten minutes later. The bluff chief had changed into civilian clothes. He took a glass of the Martel and looked hard at Shayne.

"Tell me, Mike."

Shayne told him. The whole hunch and the secret and disguised trip back. "So I figure that someone wanted me out of town very badly. Or, to be exact, wants me

out of town because I think something is going to happen that hasn't yet happened."

Gentry chewed his cigar stump. "It's a hell of a long shot, Mike. Lucy could be sweating out in Los Angeles now."

"She could be," Shayne said, "but my judgment says no. I've got a lot of experience, Will, and that's what gives me the right to judgment. I've got to get to whoever has Lucy on my terms, not on his."

Gentry gulped his cognac. The chief looked hard at Shayne.

"Okay, say your hunch is right," Gentry said slowly. "Say the whole deal was to get you out of town, as far as Los Angeles. What's to stop the kidnapers from having really taken her there anyway? I mean, why keep her here? And by taking her out there maybe they leave a small real trail to keep you busy."

Shayne nodded. In the silence of the hotel room he rubbed at his jaw and sipped his Martel. It was a good question. Gentry knew his business.

"Number one, I don't think they would have risked it, Will. Not for a small advantage of leaving me an interesting trail. No, they could have just sent a man with a piece of her clothing, something from her bag, anything. In fact, they probably did, and Tim and the L.A. cops will find it tomorrow.

"They had to know that you had

every cop in the city on the alert, that every contact of mine would be alerted. Even that Tim would have the news boys watching. Why take such a risk for so small an advantage?"

Gentry nodded agreement. "Okay, Mike. So they used a phony tipster. They knew you'd have to check it out. What's your other reason?"

"Whoever engineered this is smart and very careful. If my hunch is right, he pulled it all just to remove the chance that I could hurt him. That's careful planning. I figure that, once having snatched Lucy, he would keep her close around as an added piece of insurance in case his first plan doesn't work.

"He's already taken her, so he's in bad trouble enough. He's got nothing to lose by keeping her around, and maybe a lot to gain if anything goes wrong. As a last resort he can use her as a hostage."

This time the silence of the room was thick. Both men knew what Shayne had said. Even if his hunch were right, all the advantage was still with the men who had Lucy. If Shayne got close to them, they still had Lucy as a cover.

"All right, Mike. Let's say you're right," Gentry said. "Where does that leave us?"

Shayne stood, poured another four fingers of the Martel, and then began to pace the small space of the hotel room. There was little

room, and Shayne paced the rug like a caged lion.

"It leaves me with three possibilities, Will," Shayne said. "I've got a retainer with Continental Insurance, another with Casualty Mutual, and a third with the Jansen Detective Agency in New York. I don't like the possibility of Jansen, because how could anyone know they would call me in?"

Shayne stopped for a gulp of cognac, and went on. "But both Continental and Casualty Mutual have a lot of coverage in Miami. I've done work for both of them many times. It figures that anyone in a company insured by them, or maybe anyone planning anything against a company insured by them, would know I'd get the call."

"And if you weren't here, they'd wait for you rather than send a man down," Gentry said. "That could mean a day, maybe more than a day of lag before you got to work. It's not a lot, Mike, a day."

"But possibly enough if they were afraid of something I already knew," Shayne said.

"Anyway, if you were out of town on a case, they wouldn't expect you to drop everything on the instant," Gentry said. "It could be two days, or they could send a man from New York."

"Right," Shayne said. "Now, Will, can you do me a favor? I want to stay under cover as much as possible. I know most of the big companies insured by the two in-

surance companies, and it figures to be a big company if they went to all this trouble. At least, a company big in assets. But I don't know them all. So if you could send one of your boys to look into my files and get the names—"

"Will do, Mike," Gentry said. "And then you want me to stake out all the places?"

Shayne stopped pacing. "It's a big job, Will. And on just a hunch."

"I like your hunches," Gentry said, "and it's a kidnaping. If the Mayor or anyone wants to question later, I'll answer later." The gruff chief stood up. "All right. I better get at it. It's late, but I can get started."

"Thanks, Will. I hope my hunch is right, and we can get after them fast," Shayne said.

"So do I, Mike," Gentry said.

After the chief had left, Shayne sat with his third drink and looked at the walls of the room. He looked at each wall in turn. He needed sleep, but he did not think he was going to sleep tonight. Not with Lucy somewhere out there in the city that was slowly growing darker as the night deepened.

If Lucy was out there!

It was more than possible that while Shayne sat hiding in a Miami hotel room, Lucy was somewhere far away in Los Angeles. And there was an added hazard.

No matter where Lucy was, if the gang who had taken her suspected that their plan to lure



Shayne out of the city had not worked, they might kill her at once.

It was not a pretty thought.

Lucy could die whether his hunch were right or wrong. Because if his hunch were wrong he was out of touch with the kidnapers.

It was past two in the morning when Shayne at last decided to try to get some sleep. He could do Lucy no good by staying awake with nothing better to do than drink.

Shayne lay down, but he did not undress. For a time his eyes would not close. His brain would not rest from the constant thoughts of Lucy alone somewhere with men who didn't care if she lived or died, and probably preferred the latter. Then, slowly, he began to doze—and the telephone rang.

Shayne jerked instantly awake. His big hand grabbed the tele-

phone and almost dropped the receiver.

"Yes?" he barked.

"Mike?"

It was Will Gentry's voice.

"Yes, Will, you have something?" Shayne snapped.

"I think so, Mike. One of the names on your list was Markham, Gilley and Pinter, Incorporated?"

Shayne swore. "Sure, the wholesale jewelry outfit. Diamonds mostly. But that's a lousy three-man company!"

"Not so lousy, Mike. They just lost a cool half million dollars in stones—diamonds, rubies, the works. Cleaned out of their whole stock."

"When?"

Gentry's voice was grim. "That's the kicker, Mike. It happened early this evening. Maybe six hours ago. When my man got back from your office with the list it hit me right in the face. The robbery was reported early this evening. When I saw the company on your list it rang a four-alarm bell. And, Mike?"

"Yes, Will?"

"No leads at all. They got clean away."

"I'll be down at the side entrance," Shayne said. "Pick me up on your way."

Shayne hung up. Was this the crime? It fitted all the needs of his hunch all right, except that it was a small company. It was insured by Continental Insurance, and he,

Shayne, was sure to be called in by morning. It had happened almost as soon as he was out of town.

A \$500,000 haul was a big one. Shayne knew a thousand hoodlums who would risk a kidnaping charge for that kind of money, even at the cut price they would have to take to fence the stones.

Only one thing puzzled Shayne —there were no leads.

If there were no leads, how could Shayne hurt the thieves?

He put on his dark glasses. He looked into the mirror. Still in his disguise, no one could really tell that he was Mike Shayne. He hoped that someone was going to get a big surprise—but how?

VII

MIKE SHAYNE waited silently in the shadows of the side door of the hotel. He smoked. He was not feeling good. If this was the crime he sure was involved with Lucy's kidnapping, where did he start? A simple burglary with no clues?

Ten minutes later Will Gentry's long black car glided up to the side door of the hotel. Shayne dropped his cigarette and walked quickly across the dark sidewalk and slid into the car beside Will Gentry. The car moved off at once. The gruff chief of Miami Police nodded to Shayne.

"It looks like your hunch was right, Mike. At least, you said there was going to be some big crime in-

volving one of your retainers, and here it is. The other clients turned out quiet so far."

"Tell me about it, Will. All the details," Shayne said.

Gentry spoke low as the black car drove through the late night streets toward the offices of Markham, Gilley & Pinter. "There were four men. They appeared in the offices of the company at nine o'clock tonight. One of the partners, John Pinter, was working late with another staff member. Just the two of them.

"They never heard a thing. Pinter says the four hold-up men just appeared in the office. They wore rubber face masks. You know the trick they all use now, ever since that Brinks hold-up. Every two-bit thief in the country is covering his face with a rubber play mask.

"Anyway, they appeared. They didn't say a word. They tied up Pinter and the other man. Then they cleaned out the whole office—safe, work drawers, everything. They walked out the front door and got clean away."

Shayne was silent in the big car. Gentry chewed moodily on the stump of his black cigar. An unspoken question hovered in the silent air. Shayne finally put it into words.

"How come they had such a large amount of stones on hand, Will? Was it usual to have such a valuable stock?"

"No, Mike, it's the usual

damned thing," Gentry said bluntly. "They had just gotten a special big shipment. Sort of a middle-man deal, on consignment to be delivered all through the south. That was why Pinter was working late. The big shipment was the largest they had ever handled. It made up about half of the haul. The rest was their normal inventory."

"So the burglars somehow knew the big shipment was in the office," Shayne said.

"That's the way it looks to me," Gentry said.

"How many employees?"

"About twenty," Gentry said. "They all knew about the shipment two weeks ago. I've got my men checking them all out right now, but it's going to be a long job."

Shayne rubbed his chin. "Then how could I be so dangerous they had to go to so much trouble to get me out of town? Damn it, Will, I don't see it yet. I thought I'd see the picture as soon as I knew what was going to happen."

Gentry was grim. "Maybe you're wrong, Mike. Your hunch, I mean."

Shayne shook his head. "No, I can't be. It's too much coincidence that the crime I expected showed up exactly on schedule. They wanted me out of town, Will. But why?"

"Maybe we'll find out at the offices," Gentry said.

The black car drove on and a few minutes later pulled up in front

of the office building where Markham, Gilley & Pinter had its offices. A uniformed patrolman came and leaned into the car. He saluted Gentry.

"Anything new?" Gentry asked.

"No, sir," the patrolman said. "We haven't found anything. It looks like they parked in the alley at the side, and just went in the service entrance and took the elevator up. But we haven't found a lead."

"Bellows still upstairs?"

"Yes sir. The lieutenant is still going over the offices."

Gentry turned to Shayne. "You want to go up, Mike?"

Shayne frowned. "No, not yet. I've got to think of Lucy. I don't want anyone to know I'm back in town."

"What are you going to do?"

Shayne shrugged. "I'm going to think, Will. I'm going to sit here and think."

After Gentry and the patrolman had gone up to the offices of Markham, Gilley & Pinter, Shayne sat back in the dark interior of the big black car and thought about the hold-up and the small company. In front of him, hidden by the dark night, the shadowy head of Gentry's driver rested against the back of the front seat now, dozing, catching a little rest in what could be a long night.

For Mike Shayne it had already been a very long day and night. It was hard to realize that twenty-

four hours had not yet passed since the voice had told him over the telephone of Lucy's abduction. Less than twenty-four hours, but it seemed an eternity. He knew no more about where Lucy was than when the voice had called.

In the black car he lit a cigarette and thought about Markham, Gilley & Pinter. He clicked the company off in his mind. Not large, but a substantial firm. Conservative, not a hint of trouble all the time Continental had insured them. All its employees were bonded. Still, \$500,000 was a big temptation for anyone. Investigation might uncover one man, or woman, out of twenty with a sudden need for money.

Shayne closed his eyes, smoked, and thought about the three partners. Walter Markham: tall; grey-haired; distinguished. A gentleman of expensive tastes. Single and something of a gay man-about-town, even at sixty-two. The businessman of the trio, the organizer and administrator. Shayne liked Markham, and, excluding his penchant for women some thirty years younger, knew of no vices the man had.

Max Gilley was the salesman, the hard-sell wheeler-dealer of the partners. Short, chunky, peppery and the youngest of the three at forty-nine. Gilley was married to a handsome woman some ten years younger than himself. It seemed like a happy marriage. As far as Shayne knew, Gilley neither gam-

bled nor drank to excess. He could not, at the moment, think of anything he knew about Gilley that could hurt the man.

The last of them, John Pinter, was the technical man, the gemologist, the expert on diamonds and the other precious stones. Pinter was a diamond-cutter in his own right, although he rarely did that now. A small, thin man of fifty-four, Pinter was married to a woman almost his own age and had four children, all grown-up. The youngest about thirteen.

Shayne smoked, swore softly. He could think of nothing that he knew about any of the partners that connected to a hold-up. Of course, he did not know them that well. He had had no reason to know them. He was still trying to remember all that he knew about the company when Gentry opened the car door and sat down beside him.

"Anything important, Will?" Shayne asked.

"No, not that we can tell now. No clues at all," Gentry said. "There was no break-in for entry. It looks like they just came in the front door, and went out the same way. Pinter swears he locked the front door, but I can see that he's not absolutely sure. I figure they came prepared to break in, but found the damned door open and strolled right in. The guy working with Pinter wasn't sure the door was locked at all."

"Careless," Shayne said bluntly. "Or worse."

Gentry chewed on his cigar. "Pinter? It's possible, I suppose. He doesn't look the type, but we're checking into his background. It sure looks like those hold-up boys were tipped by someone."

"What about the other two partners?"

"Bellows says that Markham was out at the time of the robbery, didn't get home until about two. He came home alone and he's at home now with one of our men," Gentry said. "Gilley was at home all night. His wife was with him. We took his statement, and he's still at home now. All three of them are coming down to Headquarters tomorrow morning. And that's about all we can do until then."

Shayne nodded. "All more or less covered. Yet each one could have tipped the hold-up or arranged it."

Gentry scowled. "Damned dangerous, Mike. I mean, it has all the feel of an inside man. None of them could ever really show up with a sudden fortune and not arouse suspicion. The insurance people, and you, would never give up on the case, right? And where would one of them run if he wanted to? We've got them watched already, they wouldn't get far, and who's going to take them in?"

Shayne sighed. "Okay, but, damn it, Will, there's something about this hold-up that I'm sup-

posed to be able to spot and ruin the deal. Okay if I take a look at the offices up there on my own now? Are they empty?"

"They will be as soon as Pinter goes home. I'll leave one man, but otherwise it's all yours."

It was ten minutes later that John Pinter left the building. A patrol car followed Pinter. Shayne slipped out of Gentry's car, into the alley, and in the side entrance of the building.

VIII

MIKE SHAYNE left the service elevator and stood in the dim corridor. The doors of the elevator closed behind him. The redhead looked around.

This was certainly where the burglars had stood. One corridor led straight ahead and past the main entrance of Markham, Gilley & Pinter. A second corridor ran at right angles to the first corridor, past the elevator, and along toward the rear of the building.

Shayne considered the corridors. He could see nothing on the floors that might have been dropped. It was doubtful that he would find any clues as such. Lieutenant Bellow and the rest of Gentry's men knew their job.

Shayne started along the corridor toward the main entrance to Markham, Gilley & Pinter.

He stopped.

He listened. Something was odd,

A noise that was out of place. Then he knew what it was.

The service elevator was coming up again!

Gentry had said that he would leave Shayne alone in the offices. Still, maybe one of Gentry's men wanted to do some more work, or tell the officer on duty inside the offices something. That was probably all it was. And yet—

Shayne looked around. There was a mop closet just ahead along the corridor. Shayne slipped into the closet and waited. The elevator stopped at the floor. Shayne heard the doors open and close. Footsteps came along the corridor.

Slow, cautious footsteps.

Shayne tensed. The way the man was walking it could not be one of Gentry's men.

A dim, shadowy figure passed outside in the corridor as Shayne watched through a tiny crack from the closet. He could not see the figure clearly. But he could see one thing clearly—an automatic in the man's hand.

Shayne let the figure pass, and prepared to come out of the closet, his own automatic in his big hand. The man turned at that moment and looked back along the corridor. Shayne could still not see the face clearly; it seemed to be a dark face with a large nose and oddly deep eyes.

He could not see the man clearly, but he could see the caution of the man, and the fact that the man



seemed to be looking for something or someone.

Shayne tensed to jump the instant the man turned again.

But the man did not turn in the dim corridor. Instead he backed a few steps until he was directly outside the door of Markham, Gilley & Pinter. Then, with a last look all around, the man cautiously opened the door of the office and vanished quickly inside.

Shayne came out of the closet and moved quickly along the corridor. He reached the door to the offices of Markham, Gilley & Pinter. As he put his hand on the door-knob, his gun in his other hand, he heard a sudden grunt and the sound of something heavy hitting the floor.

Shayne kicked open the door and charged in with his gun ready. His grey eyes took in the scene at a glance.

The policeman left by Gentry was on the floor unconscious. The man Shayne had seen enter the office was crouched beside the prostrate form of the policeman. The gun was in the hand of the intruder and aimed at Shayne.

The redhead hurled into the room, saw it all, and in the same motion dove for cover as the intruder fired.

Shayne felt a violent blow on his right hand.

His hand went numb and the force of the blow knocked him sideways and against the wall. He came off the wall ready to fight back and then realized that he no longer held his automatic.

The blow on his hand had not been on his hand at all. It had been on his pistol. The intruder's shot had been a lucky one. It had hit his pistol and knocked it away, the force of the .45 caliber bullet numbing Shayne's hand and knocking him against the wall.

Now, for a split second, the redhead stood there as if frozen. Unarmed, he stared at the intruder, who still crouched by the unconscious policeman. The man had his automatic still trained on Shayne. Now the man stood slowly.

"Okay, buddy. Just hold it very still. You got that?"

Shayne said nothing. He just stood there without moving.

"Hands on the wall. Quick!" the man commanded.

Shayne turned and leaned

against the wall with his hands flat against the wall. He felt the deft hands of the man search him quickly but efficiently. Then he heard the man stand back, and heard the light switch on.

The only light in the office had been a desk light. Now the intruder turned on the overhead light.

"Okay, buddy, turn around."

Shayne turned.

"Sit over there. Put your hands flat on the desk. Don't move a muscle."

Shayne sat at a desk in the big office. He placed his hands flat on the desk. But he was not thinking about any of this. He was staring at the face of the intruder.

The man had no face. His face was a rubber play mask!

A dark colored rubber mask with a long nose, grotesquely bulbous lips, a rubber beard, and deep eye sockets through which the real eyes glinted menacingly.

"Okay, buddy, who are you?" the man snapped.

"Who do you want me to be?" Shayne said.

"Don't get wise, buster!" the man snapped, and the automatic wagged threateningly.

Shayne only smiled. He had realized that this man, who had to be one of the hold-up men, was looking for something—and that something had something to do with him, Shayne. The man was not going to shoot until he knew more.

"There's been a robbery. I suppose I'm a cop," Shayne said.

"Nuts! We know all the fuzz around here. You're no cop, bud-dy. Take off those dark glasses. Quick!"

Shayne removed his glasses.

"Stand up. But be careful."

Shayne stood up. The man behind the rubber mask seemed to stare at him.

"That nose, it's a fake. You're Shayne!"

"Who's Shayne?" Shayne said.

The eyes behind the rubber mask glinted coldly. The man stepped closer, the automatic trained on Shayne's heart.

"Mike Shayne's a private snooper too smart for his own good," the hold-up man said. "You're dead, Shayne, and so is your girl. That's right, smart buddy. You've killed the broad and yourself. He said you might figure it out."

"He must know me pretty well," Shayne said quietly.

"Well enough. You just couldn't play it cool, could you? Disguise and all. So you knew we wanted you out of town. You just had to sneak back. Now—"

That was as far as the hold-up man got. As he had been talking he had stepped closer to Shayne. In his recognition of the redhead he had grown momentarily careless. For one instant, as he talked, the automatic wavered and his alertness relaxed. In that instant Mike Shayne moved.

His hand swept up a heavy metal box that was on the desk and hurled it at the masked hold-up man in the same motion. As his hand moved, swept, threw; his body leaped sideways and down at the same split second.

The box struck the man in the face. The automatic fired. The bullet grazed Shayne's shoulder as he went down. Shayne hit the floor behind the desk, and with all his strength kicked a heavy desk chair straight at the man.

Confused for the moment, the man, after firing once, had started toward where Shayne had vanished behind the desk. As the man came forward the chair struck him hard in the legs. Off balance, the man grunted and went over in a sprawling heap. His automatic skidded away.

Shayne dove toward the pistol.

The masked man recovered and scrambled frantically for his gun.

Shayne reached the gun first. He grabbed it and half turned. The masked man threw himself on Shayne and the pistol skidded away again.

Shayne hit the man in the face.

The man kicked Shayne with his knee.

Shayne grabbed the man and hurled him across the room as he scrambled to his feet. The man saw Shayne's automatic and clawed for it. The man came up with Shayne's pistol in his hand.

Shayne kicked the automatic

away. He kicked hard at the man's face.

The man caught his foot and threw Shayne down.

Shayne scrambled up. The man threw the same chair at Shayne and the redhead sprawled over the chair as he charged.

The intruder jumped up, staggered, and ran out through the door into the corridor. Shayne leaped up, grabbed his automatic, and raced in pursuit.

In the corridor he saw the man go through the stairs door. He raced down the dark hall and through the door. Footsteps pounded above him. Shayne panted up in chase.

The man knew that he, Shayne, was back in town and working on the case. If the man got away it would probably be Lucy's death warrant! The redhead had to stop him.

At the top of the stairs the door to the roof stood open. Shayne ran through the door and saw the fleeing man some fifty feet ahead. Shayne fired. The man ran on and out of sight behind some rooftop structures.

Shayne came around the corner of one of the structures—and the man was gone. Feeling cold, Shayne let his grey eyes search for the man in the night.

Then he saw him.

The masked man was at the edge of the roof. A long board was thrown across the wide gap to the

next building, and even as Shayne watched the man started across.

Shayne ran toward the spot, but even as he ran he knew he would not reach the man in time.

Once on the other roof, the masked intruder would pull the board after him, and escape.

Shayne reached the edge of the roof.

The man reached the far side. He kicked the board free from the top of the parapet of the other roof.

In another second the man would be gone.

Shayne dropped to one knee, held his automatic in both hands, and fired.

He fired at the man's legs.

The man screamed. His left leg buckled. He swayed at the edge of the roof, clawed for something to hold, and for a long split second hung there in mid-air.

Then with a grotesque scream, the man fell over the edge of the roof and plunged all the way down to the dark street below. Shayne looked down for a moment, then turned and walked slowly back toward the stairs down.

IX

IN THE OFFICES of Markham, Gilley & Pinter, the patrolman who had been attacked was groggily awake. Shayne helped the man into a chair and then called Gentry. The chief of police listened in silence.

"I wanted to take him alive, Will, but I had to stop him getting away," Shayne said.

"I understand, Mike," Gentry said. "We'll be down in a few minutes. At least he won't get back to the rest of them."

"They still won't know that I'm back in town," Shayne said, "and won't change whatever their plan is. One thing, Will."

"Yes, Mike?"

"Now we know that they did kidnap Lucy just to get me out of Miami," Shayne said. "All I have to do is try to find out what I know that's so dangerous to them."

"Maybe we can get a clue from the guy you killed," Gentry said. "Maybe he'll lead us to them."

"Maybe," Shayne said.

But the redhead did not think so. At least, he did not think that an identification of the dead intruder would lead to the hold-up men, and Lucy, in time. Whatever they had in mind would have to happen soon. They could not have expected Shayne to stay away too long after the hold-up had been reported to Continental Insurance.

No, whatever was going to happen, that they were so worried Shayne could prevent, would happen soon.

Shayne turned to the patrolman who had been attacked.

"You all right now?" Shayne asked.

The patrolman nodded. "I think so. I'll just take it easy a minute,

you know. I feel lousy. I was sort of trying to think about the case when he jumped me. I had my back to the door, and I guess I wasn't alert. Damn."

"We all make mistakes," Shayne said. "Keep alert this time, I'm going to take a look over the place."

Shayne stood there in the large main office of the jewel company and tried to visualize the scene. Nothing had been touched. It was clear where Pinter and the other member of the staff had been working—a long table at the far end of the room. The front door was in sight from the long table, but was some distance away. It was possible that the four men could have entered very quietly and not been heard until they seemed to "appear."

The rest of the office was taken up by three storerooms and the three private offices of the partners. Jewels do not require a great deal of space, and the company was not in the retail business. They had no need for showrooms and other details of retail trade.

Shayne went from room to room. In each of the storerooms he found a shambles where the jewels had been hastily scooped up by the thieves. The main vault was open, but it had been blown open, not opened by a key.

He carefully inspected each storeroom. They were small, dark rooms without windows and lighted only by artificial light. There were



air-conditioning ducts, but they had not been touched as far as Shayne could tell. The ducts were large enough for a man to have crawled through, but the screws that held the covers were painted over and had not been tampered with.

Shayne then began to inspect the three offices of the partners.

The office of John Pinter was the smallest and the nearest to the main entrance. It had a desk, a couch, and three chairs in addition to the desk chair. There was also a table for the examination of the jewels, and a large bookcase filled with books about gemstones. On the table there was a microscope of a special type used for jewels.

There were also three windows and a door. Shayne looked out each of the windows. A sheer drop, no fire escape, and no building close enough. Shayne turned his attention to the door. It was a solid wooden door and was locked with a deadfall lock from inside.

Shayne closed his eyes and pictured the layout of the offices and the corridors. The way the three private offices were located, Shayne realized that the door in Pinter's office opened into the cross corridor that led from the service elevator. But the deadlock was stiff and corroded. Shayne could barely move it, and could not open it. The lock had not been oiled in a couple of years.

He found nothing in Pinter's office and went on to Markham's office. It was larger, with four windows, and its furnishings were the most lavish. The chairs and couches were leather, and the desk was a massive pile of mahogany. The books in Markham's shelves were primarily business volumes.

The door in this office was exactly the same, and the lock was equally corroded. The windows gave no more chance of access. Shayne went on to Gilley's office.

The office of the salesman partner fitted somewhere between the first two in decor. It was better furnished than Pinter's office, but not as elegant as Markham's office. Shayne could picture their business set-up. As far as he recalled they were equal partners, but Markham was the front and dealt with the customers, so had the best office. Pinter was all science and technology, so he had the least pretentious office. Gilley was right in the middle. And, then, the offices had to reflect the taste of each man.

Shayne could see the character of Pinter in his austere and modest office, and he could see the character of the elegant and aristocratic Markham in his office. Gilley's office fitted right in—it was loud and expensive without being tasteful. A salesman's office. And yet—

Shayne let his eyes glance all around Gilley's office. There was an incongruous feeling about Gilley's office. While most of it was loud and brash, there were certain touches—two very good paintings on the walls; a series of books on military tactics, from Alexander The Great to Douglas MacArthur; another series of books on Latin American History; two small wooden carved statues of some kind of African tribal gods.

Shayne rubbed his gaunt jaw. Gilley? What was it he knew about Gilley? Something in this office of the salesman partner had given his mind a twist, a pinch. It was as if small fingers were trying to move inside his head. Something about Gilley that he did know. But what?

Shayne shook his head. Whatever it was would come. He turned his attention to the windows. It was the same story here—no access, no fire-escapes. He examined the door. An identical door to those in the other offices. The same deadlock, rusted and corroded.

Shayne stopped thinking. His grey eyes stared at the lock on the inside of Gilley's door. It looked identical, and yet—Shayne

touched the lock lightly. There were places where the dust and grime had been disturbed.

The change was faint, very faint, and yet where the moving parts were corroded, there was the smallest of hairline cracks. Shayne tried the lock. It turned stiff and hard, but it turned. He opened the door and looked out. It was the cross corridor, and the service elevator was not more than twenty feet along the corridor.

Shayne examined the lock closely. He touched the inner bolt. He looked at his hand. There was no doubt. The lock had been oiled! Very lightly oiled, wiped carefully, but it had been oiled, and recently. Shayne stared at the lock.

Then he saw the outside of the door.

He looked at it for some time. Then he stepped along the hall and looked at the other two doors into the offices of the jewel company. He should have guessed. A company that handles such fortunes in jewels would not want side doors that could be entered.

There was nothing on the outsides of the doors. No lock, no doorknob, no keyhole!

The doors were completely smooth—on the outside. They could be opened only from the inside, and from the look of them they were never opened.

Except that the door into Gilley's office had been opened.

Shayne bent down and looked

at the floor. There was no doubt. In the dust that had accumulated under the door over the years of remaining unopened there were distinct footprints!

Someone had come through this door from the corridor into the office of Max Gilley, and the door could only be unlocked from the inside.

And the lock had not been picked or broken!

Shayne walked slowly back into Max Gilley's office and closed the door softly. He stood there in the silent office and stared at the door for sometime. All right; this door had been opened and used. All the other comparable doors were corroded shut.

But he had no way of knowing just when the door had been used.

He had no proof that this was how the hold-up men had made their entry so silently and unseen.

If it were how they had come in, there was no way of knowing for sure just who had opened the door.

The door had been securely locked from inside by the time the police arrived, which was why they had not noticed that it had been used. But that could easily have been done by the hold-up men themselves.

The door was left unlocked. The hold-up men entered. They locked the door again behind them, and went out into the main office. Shayne frowned. He strode quickly

across the office to the door, out into the main office.

The lock on this door was a spring lock, easily opened from inside. Shayne opened the door and looked closely at the lock on the outside.

A key lock!

The door into Gilley's office had to be unlocked with a key. The door into the office. Which was why the outer door could be left unlocked after Gilley had left. No one could get into Gilley's office without a key! Who had keys to Gilley's office?

Shayne rubbed his left ear. It was a hundred-to-one that only the partners had keys to each others' offices; if anyone had such keys except the man who occupied the office!

What was it he knew about Max Gilley? The small nibbling at his brain that would not come clear?

Because one thing was very sure. The unlocked door was just another indication of the main factor in the whole affair—time!

Someone had wanted him, Mike Shayne, out of town for a time. For the first twenty-four hours after the hold-up, at least. And someone knew that the unlocked door would be discovered sooner or later. And it was more and more a certainty that there had to have been an inside man. And the hold-up men had been so worried about something happening too soon that they had risked having one of them

watching the building. Because that was the only way the dead hold-up man could have followed Shayne up to the offices.

Time.

The holdup men needed time, and the only reason had to be for an escape. Whatever it was that Shayne was supposed to know, or guess, it had to be involved in the escape plan.

Only whose escape plan? Which one of the partners was the inside man? Which one had Lucy? If he did not guess right, Lucy could be dead before tomorrow night.

X

IN THE GOOD but spartan office of Will Gentry, Mike Shayne sat in a chair with his long legs stretched out before him and listened to Gentry read the report on the man Shayne had killed.

"Male, Caucasian, about thirty-five years old. No distinguishing marks. Prints not in our files, we've sent them on to the FBI. His clothes had New York labels, so we've got a teletype out to New York. We don't make him in our files at all. Nothing on him to give any leads, and nothing that seems to connect him to Lucy."

Shayne nodded. "What about keys to Gilley's office?"

"All three partners have keys to each office," Gentry said. "But no one else does."

"So we're down to three."

"If that door was the real method of entry, Mike."

"It was, I know it. And it's got to be an inside job. There had to be a tip, Will."

"All right, but it's not proof, and I need proof," Gentry said. "So far none of them has made a move. Damn it, Mike, it might not be an inside job after all. I mean, maybe they got wind of the shipment from the other end, from those who shipped the stones to Markham, Gilley & Pinter. Or maybe it was just luck. That's happened before, believe me."

"I know," Shayne said, "but this has all been planned too carefully. I've been on to my answering service, and no one has called about Lucy. They don't want ransom or a favor, Will; they just wanted me busy out of town. It's more than a hunch now."

"I talked to Tim out in Los Angeles, and he says they've come up with absolutely nothing. The L.A. police say they're just about sure Lucy isn't in L.A., and I agree. She's right here, Will, in the hands of someone who wants cover for a getaway with five hundred thousand dollars in stones."

"My hands are tied, Mike, until one of them makes a move. We're out after the hold-up men, but we haven't a smell so far."

"We won't have," Shayne said, "until they move again, and that could be too late."

Gentry chewed on the stump of

his black cigar and scowled. "You know as well as I do, Mike, that we've got nothing on anyone. In a case like this we've got to wait to pick up the hold-up men and get a story, or actually come up with real evidence against the inside man."

"We've got no connection yet. Unless we could get the inside man to confess, we've got to wait for a break. Either we catch the gang, or our man makes his run. Sooner or later we'll get them all, but it takes time."

Time. There it was again. The whole case was time, and Shayne thought with a cold feeling that time was running out for him—and for Lucy.

Shayne looked at his watch. "I'm betting our man has to move soon. It's almost six o'clock now. I think he'll move before he's due in here at nine o'clock. And when he moves it'll be quick and safe."

"No move is safe with those stones," Gentry says.

"His will be, Will. He's got it planned all the way. And it won't be any route we expect. It's something very special, something I might guess, but no one else."

Shayne stood up, began to pace. "He's staked it all on the getaway. He knew you wouldn't pick him up without some lead to him—and yet he knew it had to look like an inside job. So he knows that when he moves it has to be fast, short, and so safe you can't touch him after may a brief period of danger."

Shayne looked down at Gentry. "Whatever it is, Will, he was worried, really worried, about only one thing—that I could come up with something that would stop him before he was safe! He's worried about being stopped too soon."

Gentry swore. "Okay, then I'll pick them all up now. I have enough to hold them for questioning."

Shayne shook his head, paced. "But that doesn't help Lucy. No, Will, as I said all along he'll have Lucy somewhere as a safety measure in case we stop him. And you don't have enough to hold anyone long. No, we've got to work out what he's afraid of, what route he could use to get away safe."

Gentry shrugged. "I don't know of any safe way to run out with five hundred thousand dollars in hot gems. No matter where he goes we'll get him. No matter what route he used, we'd figure it out as soon as he exposed himself by running."

Shayne nodded. "All right; let's start there. First, his plan has to be based on complete safety from the police when he gets away from Miami. Second, his route has to be such that it won't help us even when we know it, when he's exposed himself. Third, it has to be something that we could stop if we knew it in time."

Gentry raised his arms wide in disgust. He puffed on his cigar, stared up at Mike Shayne.

"First, there are a few places that don't have extradition treaties for robbery, but they're hard to get to. Second, I can't think of any route except magic that we couldn't stop him on once we knew it. I mean, we've got the airports covered. No one would get far by car. The Coast Guard can pick up any boat at sea. No matter what he does he's a fugitive, Mike."

Shayne nodded. "He moves, and you cover every exit from the city. You're on roadblocks, you're at the airports, and you can watch any ship."

"Sure," Gentry said. "Maybe he figures on Cuba, but he's got to get there, and that isn't easy now. Besides, they don't take to letting thieves in, not even with five hundred thousand dollars." Gentry laughed. "They'd take the loot and send him back!"

But Shayne had stopped pacing and stopped listening. The big redhead stood in the silent office as if paralyzed. He blinked his grey eyes. Gentry stared at him.

"Mike? You've got it?" Gentry said quickly.

Shayne slowly sat down. His grey eyes were fixed on Gentry's face. "Haiti!"

"What?" Gentry barked.

"Haiti, Will! Max Gilley and Haiti! Damn it, that's got to be it." Shayne stared at Gentry. "Four years ago I was in Washington. Some special crime commission called me up there, I remember.



Damn it, of course! I went to a dinner with Assistant Attorney General Walters. It was one of those big Washington affairs. You know, all sorts of Ambassadors, Congressmen, the works."

"So?" Gentry said.

"Max Gilley was there. Damn! One of those little things you don't remember. I'd only met him once or twice. But he spoke to me. He was drunk, excited; he wanted me to meet his friends. He must have been afraid I'd remember right away if I was called into the case."

"Remember what?" Gentry snapped.

"His friends, Will. They were Haitians. Government people from Haiti. One was a woman. A very beautiful woman. Gilley was all over her. But it was more than that, too. He was involved with them. You understand? They were im-

portant people from Haiti, and I don't know if they're in or out down there now."

Shayne stopped. Now he saw in his mind the books on the shelves of Max Gilley's office: military books; and books on the history of Latin America. Where he sat he reminded Gentry of those books.

"All right," Gentry said, "so what? The Haitian government wouldn't protect him."

"Are you sure?" Shayne said. "Listen, Will, what if Gilley was very close to some important people down there—the woman, say? He gets there, and they deny he's even there. I imagine that five hundred thousand dollars is a lot of money down there, and for all I know he might have more stashed away there. Maybe this is just a last big haul to take with him."

Shayne was up again, pacing. "What if they don't admit he's there? Relations between us and Haiti are touchy, always have been. If they deny he's there, how do we touch him? He stays out of sight, changes his name and appearance, and our government isn't going to push it. On top of that, if he gets the whole gang there, how do we ever prove a case against him? We can't arrest them without proof and the loot."

Gentry was skeptical. "All right. Say he gets there and they protect him, fine. But how does he get there? The moment he moves we're all over every way out of the city."

We'd spot a flight to Haiti, or a ship. We'd have him in hours, before he got to Haiti."

Shayne nodded. "There can't be a lot of ways to get to Haiti from here."

"As far as I know almost nothing that doesn't stop first in Puerto Rico or The Virgin Islands or the Bahamas, all places we'd grab him like a sitting duck. A private plane we'd spot in minutes once he ran," Gentry said. "Damn it, Mike, even if he reached some means of transportation, we'd get him after he got aboard. I'd have a warrant to pick him up as a material witness in ten minutes!"

"You wouldn't have to, Will," Shayne said. "It's my guess he'll have the jewels with him by then. They went to a lot of trouble to keep me out of this. I think that means the whole gang will be together—and with the stones."

Gentry laughed. "Then we'd really have him. What way could he run where we couldn't touch him?"

Shayne again stopped pacing. He looked at Gentry. "Will, are there any Haitian ships in port?"

"How do I—" Gentry began.

"Find out, can you?" Shayne said.

"Sure, Mike," Gentry said.

The chief picked up the telephone and snapped out some orders. Then he hung up and the two men waited. Ten minutes passed. Then fifteen. Mike Shayne paced,

Gentry puffed on his cigar, crushed it out, and lighted a fresh cigar.

Twenty minutes later the telephone rang. The sun was already up in the sky outside the office as another day came to Miami. Gentry picked up the receiver and listened for a minute. Then he barked a thanks, and hung up. He looked at Shayne.

"No Haitian ships at all," Gentry said. "Except a private yacht that docked last evening. It sails at eight o'clock this morning."

"Private yacht?" the redhead said.

"Yeh," Gentry said. "It belongs to some political big shot down there, and—"

Gentry stopped, blinked, the cigar smoke curling unnoticed into his dark eyes. Shayne had half-turned. Now the two men stared at each other in dead silence for a full minute.

"Some political bigshot in Haiti," Gentry said. "Maybe a Government official. The yacht made an unscheduled stop here."

"Haiti's a small country, corrupt sometimes," Shayne said. "I'll bet the yacht is classified as a Government ship, a naval vessel."

"Put a gun on it and call it a gunboat," Gentry said, "and pay no taxes. It's a common trick down there."

"The government pays the maintenance, too," Shayne said. "A neat trick."

Gentry blew fierce smoke.

"You're sure about Gilley and Haiti?"

"I'm sure now," Shayne said. "It's what he was afraid I would remember, Will, and it's condition two, right? Once aboard that yacht we can't touch him. He'd be on Haitian property. If they said he wasn't on the ship, we wouldn't even request to board. He could take the whole gang aboard, stolen jewels and all!"

Gentry stood up. "Then let's get him, Mike."

Shayne did not move. "No, Will, we can't go and get him."

This time the silence in the room was as thick as mud.

XI

MIKE SHAYNE paced the brightening morning office.

"If you pick him up at his house, Will, you've got nothing on him, and the gang still has Lucy. We've got to think of Lucy."

Shayne's gaunt face was haggard now with the long, endless day and night without sleep or rest. His grey eyes were sunk in fatigue, but they had not lost their cool snap of reason. For a moment the redhead looked out Gentry's window at the sunlight just beginning to wash the city and the distant blue water.

"It's my guess that Gilley will rendezvous with the rest of the gang and go to the yacht. We've got to let him, Will," Shayne said.

"All right. We let him run, meet

the gang, and then we pick him up at the yacht," Gentry agreed.

Shayne shook his head again. "We can't pick him up then either, Will."

Gentry swore. "Now listen, Mike, when I get that gang all together, I'm going—".

"He's our only lead to Lucy, Will," Shayne said. "He'll leave a man with her. He won't release her, or have her killed, until he's on that yacht."

"I can't let him escape, Mike," Gentry said. "Not even for Lucy."

"I know that," Shayne said. "You've got to stop him from getting to the yacht, but don't pick him up."

Gentry chewed on his cigar that had gone out now. He looked out his sunny window. He was not looking at Shayne.

"Let him go and tail him?" Gentry said at last. "That's risky, Mike. Risky for you and for me and for Lucy."

"What else have we got, Will?"

"If they get away again, it could be my scalp and Lucy's life, Mike," Gentry said.

"I know that, Will, but I've got to find where she is before we can do anything," Shayne said.

"How will you do it?"

"I'll have to chance tailing them from the yacht after they spot you and your men," Shayne said.

Gentry shook his head. "Too risky, Mike. You could lose them in a hundred ways. They'll be alert

when they see us at the ship. They'll know we're on to them, and they'll be on watch for a tail."

"I know," Shayne said, "but we don't have time to set up a team to keep them under watch, Will."

Gentry nodded gloomily. "Damn it, Mike, if only Lucy wasn't involved in this."

"Which shows how smart they are," Shayne said. "They took her as protection, and it's working. Gilley's a military science amateur, Will. His move with Lucy was a double safety. He got me out of the way, he hoped, and if that didn't work he has her as a hostage. He'll have an alternate plan of escape, and Lucy covers his rear."

"All right, you tail them. What happens if you lose them?"

"Then we'll have to wait for them to move again. He has to get to Haiti somehow. Sooner or later he'll have to move, and he'll probably try to trade Lucy for a safe conduct."

"You know I couldn't make a deal like that," Gentry said.

"I know it, but I hope Gilley doesn't," Shayne said. "Let's hope I'm lucky and don't lose them."

"All right, Mike," Gentry said. "But I'm going to hang a transmitter on your car. That way we can at least follow you in case you need us."

"That sounds good, Will."

Gentry picked up the telephone again and began to issue orders. He instructed his lab to affix a homing

transmitter to Shayne's car. He ordered two units to the pier where the Haitian yacht was tied up. He instructed them to hide, but not to hide too well. Let themselves be seen, but not make it easy.

Then Gentry stopped in mid sentence. Shayne watched the chief listening. Gentry hung up and stood.

"My unit at Gilley's house reported in," Gentry said. "Two minutes ago. Gilley's on the move. He drove out of his garage suddenly and gave my unit the slip five minutes ago! He's making his run, Mike."

"Let's go!" Shayne snapped.

The two men walked quickly out of the office and down into the morning sun of Miami. The units were waiting. Shayne took his own car. They all drove fast to the pier in the fine morning. The yacht was ready for sea. Steam was up. Only two lines still linked the yacht to shore. It was exactly seven-thirty in the morning.

"The transmitter's working, Mike," Gentry said as the two men stood in the shadows of the pier and out of sight of the yacht. Gentry's men were in place. On the yacht a dark woman leaned on the rail of the bridge and stared down at the police. She did not move, she only stood and watched.

"Good," Shayne said. His grey eyes looked around. The approach to the yacht was a narrow lane along the pier itself. There was no

other way. A car would have to drive down the lane of the pier and swing out into the open loading area.

Shayne looked up the pier toward the street. Just where the lane began on the pier, there was an alley across the street. It had a perfect command of the lane onto the pier.

"I'll park up in that alley. They can't see me," Shayne said, "and I can't miss them. They'll have to drive back from the pier the same way they go on."

Gentry agreed. "Okay, Mike. That woman on the yacht has seen us. She'll give the high sign. I just hope Gilley doesn't call the yacht first and get scared off before he shows here."

"We have to chance that," Shayne said grimly.

He did not add, but he thought, that chance was too big a factor in the whole affair. It was eighty percent chance, and nothing could be done about it. That was the nature of a kidnaping.

Gentry left to take up his position with his men. Shayne got back into his car and drove off the pier and into the alley across the street from the pier. He backed into the alley, lighted a cigarette, and stared out over the pier at the blue water of the harbor.

Shayne looked at his watch. It was a quarter to eight. Gilley was cutting it fine, if he was coming. Shayne could be wrong. He did not



think that he was wrong, too much pointed to the entire sequence of events, but he could be. He smoked and waited.

At five minutes to eight, Shayne began to feel uneasy. If he was wrong? Then—

The car turned slowly into the street and came down in the sun toward the pier. Shayne crouched down in his car. He was far enough back so that they could not see him, but he wanted to be sure.

The car stopped at the head of the pier. Shayne realized that they were not going onto the pier. He watched four men get out. Three were strangers, but the fourth was Max Gilley. It was Gilley who carried a large leather case. The four men looked around, and then began to walk fast along the pier toward the yacht that was out of sight from where they had parked.

Shayne stared at the parked car. If he tried to tail he could lose them.

He got out of his car and moved quickly to their car. The keys had been left in the ignition. They had not opened the trunk. Shayne took the keys, moved quickly to the rear

of the car, and opened the trunk. It was a large trunk—and empty.

Shayne stared at the open trunk. If he tailed he could lose them easily. But inside the trunk—He had to make a quick decision, weigh the risk.

He ran to the front, put the keys back into the ignition, returned to the trunk, drew his automatic, and climbed inside. He lowered the trunk until it almost locked. He took out his handkerchief, tore off strips of cloth, and stuffed two small strips into the lock. Then he lowered the trunk as far as it would go.

The trunk could not lock now. Inside, Shayne held his automatic in his right hand, and held the trunk closed with his left. He hoped he had a good enough grip. If the trunk flew open while the car was moving, he was in trouble.

He lay there in the dark.

Minutes passed. Endless minutes like hours.

Then he heard running feet.

The feet came up to the car, were all around the car. The feet did not pause, did not come near the trunk. The car sagged under the sudden weight of men piling into it. The motor started. With a wild squeal of rubber against concrete the car lurched into motion.

Shayne braced inside the trunk. The car moved rapidly into high gear, suddenly leaned far over in a turn, straightened, and roared away.

Inside the trunk Mike Shayne hung on.

So far he had a better chance of finding Lucy than if he had tried to follow them. But he was alone. The homing transmitter was on his car in the alley.

Shayne was on his own—and there were four of them.

XII

MIKE SHAYNE, inside the trunk, tried to follow the turns of the car, and looked at the luminous dial of his watch in the dark trunk.

The first turn, he knew, had been along Moreton Street, away from the bay. The next turn had led to the curving entry to the parkway. After that he estimated the speed and watched his watch.

The car drove steadily north through the city and out into the northern suburbs. Shayne could tell by the speed and the changing sounds and echos outside.

When the car fianlly turned off the parkway, Shayne guessed that they were in an area of highway motels and small, shabby suburban villages—the hungry areas that were once villages but now hung onto the skirts of the city and lived off the crumbs of the tourists.

The car drove some distance farther after leaving the parkway, and then turned sharply and Shayne heard the crunch of gravel beneath the tires. The gravel continued to crunch for some hundred

yards, and then the car made a slow turn and came to a halt.

Shayne felt the car dip, and then rise as the four men got out. A cold, hard voice sounded almost directly above Mike Shayne.

"Okay, Gilley, it didn't work. You got any ideas?"

"I have many ideas, Macjic, and you remember who's running this little operation," the voice of Max Gilley said. Shayne now recognized the voice of the salesman partner. He also recognized the undercurrent of uneasiness in the voice. So did the man named Macjic.

"I'll remember, as long as you can run it, Gilley. You like being a general, but I ain't sure you got the nerve for it," Macjic said.

"I have all the nerve I need," Gilley's voice snapped. "It must be that damned Shayne. He came back. No one else could have guessed about that yacht."

"All right. The peeper came back and queered that deal," the hard voice named Macjic said. "What next?"

"We put the alternate plan into effect, of course. I was not unprepared for this. Come inside the house."

Shayne lay almost without breathing inside the trunk. He listened to the crunch of feet in gravel. The sound went on for some half a minute, and then there was the noise of feet on wood, and the creak and slam of a screen door.

Shayne waited, and while he

waited he tried to guess what the ground outside was like. There was a gravel drive, and then a wide gravel yard. A house with a wooden porch. The house was some distance from where the car had been parked. The car was not in a garage. As far as his ears had told him, all four men had gone to the house, but he had no idea if there were other men, or if the car was clearly visible from the house.

He was sure there had to be at least one more man, because someone had to have been left with Lucy.

He lay listening and holding his automatic for another four minutes. He heard no sounds and no movement but a faint and distant sound of the traffic on the parkway.

Shayne took a deep breath, and opened the trunk a crack.

His right eye peered out.

The sun was bright all around the rear of the car—but the car itself was in the shade. Directly behind the trunk was the thick trunk of a tree. Beyond the tree Shayne saw only bushes, flowers and open fields.

The car was nosed toward the house!

At least he was in that much luck.

And he saw no one, which was also luck, but unfortunately he could not see the whole area in front of the car.

He took another deep breath, opened the trunk all the way and

leaped out and closed it down all in a single motion.

An instant later Shayne was crouched behind the tree and looking toward the house. He had made no sound, the trunk not closed all the way down. Nothing moved in the immediate area. The windows of the house were heavily curtained, even in the Florida heat.

It was a ramshackle two-story frame house of the kind they used to build all over the country from Independence, Missouri, to Key West before people got ethnic about the place they lived instead of their heritage. Now all the buildings in Florida had Indian, Spanish or modern architecture.

The yard was all gravel and dusty. The trees drooped with dust. It had all the air of a temporary hideout. The kind of place Hollywood always has bank robbers hide out in; and, strangely, Hollywood is right.

There was another car parked on the far side of the house. Inside the house itself nothing seemed to move. The entire scene was one of peace. A peace Mike Shayne knew that he was going to have to shatter soon.

The redhead looked carefully all around. To his left the grove of trees curved in a gentle arc toward the rear of the property. He could move in the cover of the trees to a point some thirty feet closer to the house at the rear. After that he would have to move in the open.

He crouched and darted from tree to tree until he had reached the point closest to the house. Then he saw that he had another break in his favor. From where he crouched, the rear windows of the house all shaded with shades down, there was a shallow ditch that ran to the downspout at the rear of the house —as if the shallow ditch had been cut but years of rain run-off from the roof.

Shayne went down on his belly and crawled along the shallow depression. He reached the rear of the house just at the back steps and crouched beside the steps. He reached up and tried the rear screen door. It was locked.

Shayne studied the door. He could see the simple hook inside. He reached into his pocket and took out his pocket knife. Deftly he cut a hole in the screen and unhooked the door and slipped inside. He crouched again in the gloom of the back porch.

The house seemed strangely silent. Flies buzzed in the small back porch. A closed wooden door led into the house. It was not locked. Shayne opened it and slid through. He closed the door behind him and stood almost holding his breath in the back hall of the old-fashioned house.

Then he heard the voices. They came from the distant front of the house, and they were arguing. Shayne guessed that Max Gilley was having trouble with Macjic

and the other professionals. That was good. If they argued, maybe that would keep them busy long enough for him to find Lucy.

He did not care about them or the loot just now. His first job was Lucy. He inched silently along the hall toward the front hall where a staircase of massive dark wood mounted up in the dim interior to the second floor. It was odds—on that they had Lucy on the second floor.

He knew the layout of houses like this—all large rooms on the ground floor to hold the coolness behind drawn shades as long as possible. The smaller rooms were all on the second floor. Shayne reached the foot of the stairs and started up. He made no sound, moving with the amazing cat-like agility for such a big man.

At the top of the stairs he paused to listen. The voices still argued below. Mostly Max Gilley's voice explaining, instructing. The salesman-partner sounded like a general before the battle. Shayne went on along the upstairs hall.

He listened at each door.

At the last door along the upstairs hall he heard the noise. A woman's cough! Then he heard water run, and footsteps, and a man's voice.

"Here, drink. You ain't got long, no sense you coughing like that, sister."

"Thanks," the woman said, and it was Lucy!



Shayne heard the familiar voice with a leap in his stomach. He put his hand on the doorknob and slowly began to turn it.

The voice was behind him.
"I told you, didn't I, Gilley?"

Shayne straightened, turned.

Four men stood there. Max Gilley was one of them. The other three were hoods. The tallest had to be the man named Macjic, the one who had spoken. A tall, cold, cobra-like man—thin and deadly, and with eyes just dumb enough to be very dangerous.

"Drop the gun, mister."

Shayne dropped his automatic. One of the men came and picked up the gun and stepped back.

Max Gilley stared at Mike Shayne. "How did you know? How did you guess, Shayne? It was fool-proof! You hear? Fool-proof!"

"It was stupid," Shayne said, "and you're dead, Gilley."

Gilley's face contorted. He

stepped to Shayne and slapped the redhead hard across the face.

Shayne laughed.

"Okay," the tall man named Macjic said. "How did you get here, peeper? Did you come alone?"

Shayne just laughed again.

"Bring him downstairs," Macjic said. "The broad, too. We got to move fast."

XIII

MIKE SHAYNE and Lucy Hamilton sat bound to chairs in the small dressing room area behind the main living room of the house. A small, pale man sat in a chair in the doorway alternately watching them and turning to listen to the debate still going on in the large living room.

"You're all right, Angel?" Shayne said.

Lucy smiled. "I'm fine, if stupid, Michael. I just walked right up to them. You'd think I would have learned more caution after all the years with you."

Shayne grinned. That was just like Lucy—under the threat of sudden death for days and all she talked about was her error in letting herself be taken so easily. But she was human, too. Shayne watched her look nervously at the door.

"Do—do we have much chance, Michael?"

"We always have a chance, An-

gel," Shayne said. "Listen to them. They're nervous."

The voices were louder in the living room as the gang debated their next move.

"How do you know he came alone?" Macjic said.

"I just know it," Gilley said. "Shayne is that kind of man. Isn't it obvious that he was in the trunk of the car? We found it open, the lock jammed. There was no other way he could have followed us, and that means no one else followed us."

"You think, but you don't know. You've already blown one big plan," Macjic sneered. "I never liked the kidnap caper in the first place."

"Do you want to run all your life?" Gilley shouted. "Once you start running they'll pick you up one by one unless you have a haven. Haiti is the haven. I'm in good there. I'm on their side, have been for years. I'll be a big man there, and we'll all be protected. Why do you think I decided to steal the jewels? I don't need money, not for myself. It's to set myself up over in Haiti."

Shayne heard Gilley take a deep breath. "I'm in with people who are important now, but who're going to be a lot more important. When I get there with the money we'll all be safe as in church. No extradition, no admission that we're even there. That's why we have to follow the alternate plan."

Macjic laughed. "Like we had to follow the big plan? How do we know you can deliver on this one any better, Gilley?"

"It's risky, of course, but it's better than running. Look, the yacht will be cruising off shore tonight, as soon as it's dark. All we have to do is get twenty miles to the boat. They'll have the Coast Guard watching by now; it won't be as good as the first plan, but it's our best plan. We keep the woman with us, then we tip them where she is. While they pick her up, we make it out to the yacht."

There was a silence in the living room. A long silence. Shayne listened, and he could picture the scene. The three pros were all watching Gilley, and each other. They did not like the complications. They were pros, and they liked a regular getaway plan. They probably wanted to drive far and fast from Miami and Florida, hole up in some remote place, and wait for the heat to cool. Then they would try to get away all the way.

But the prospect of a safe haven was strong.

"All right, Gilley," Macjic said, "but you'll do a little bending. We blow this place. I don't like it when I'm found by anyone. One guy can do it, anyone can do it."

"I don't like unnecessary moving, Macjic," Gilley snapped. "That's the unnecessary risk. Every move we make exposes us."

"This ain't the army, Gilley,"

Macjic said. "We got no flank. And the first error of a crook is to stay in one place when he has been found. We move."

There was another silence. While it was going on, and the guard was watching out into the living room, Shayne touched Lucy with his foot and nodded at her to indicate that she stay alert from now on, be ready.

Shayne was thinking hard. They were all about to make an even bigger error. They were going to take the unnecessary risk of moving two prisoners they had secured, and they were going to do it while they were disagreed. They did not know for sure who was giving the orders, Gilley or Macjic.

Shayne considered. The other two hoods would watch Macjic. Macjic would watch Gilley. Shayne did not know what the fifth man, the small one who was in the chair in the doorway, would do. He was the man who had given Lucy the water.

While Shayne was thinking the silence had grown. Then it was broken by Gilley's reluctant voice.

"Very well, Macjic, but I'm against it. I don't like moving with the girl. Not before we're ready. And I don't like moving Shayne."

"So we don't move Shayne," Macjic said. "We leave him—dead."

"Risk a shot being heard? Murder? Why do you people want to complicate everything by killings?

The crime of robbery is one my Haitian friends don't care about, and no one is going to chase us very hard. Murder is another matter."

"It's already kidnaping, Gilley."

"Only technically. It's more like taking a hostage."

"Tell that to the jury when they charge you," Macjic said. "Now let's move. I don't like sitting around here. The cops could be moving in right now."

"Do you have somewhere we can go, Macjic?"

"You bet I do. I keep a couple of hide-outs on any caper like this, just in case. Boys, pack it up and let's move."

There were noises in the living room. Shayne listened as the gang spread out to its jobs. He heard the outside door open and close. Distant voices talked urgently. A few minutes later the car motor started up to the right of the house.

The small, pale man in the doorway stood and looked out as if not sure that he was going with the rest of them. Shayne kicked Lucy again. She looked at him, her brown eyes alert and ready.

Shayne whispered softly, forming the words with his lips alone. "Faint. When they untie you, faint, bite them. Do anything to draw attention."

Lucy nodded.

Shayne listened. He was sure that they would send only one man to bring himself and Lucy. A lot

would depend on which man. He watched the small man at the door. Then he saw the man smile and nod. Someone was coming.

Shayne felt lucky again. The man was one of the hold-up men, not Macjic nor Gilley. He came into the room carrying his pistol. But he was not an amateur.

"Untie them," the hood said to the guard.

The guard came and untied them. The hold-up man remained across the room with his pistol leveled. Shayne looked at Lucy quickly and gave a small shake of his head. Not yet.

"We going somewhere?" Shayne said.

"Button your lip," the hold-up man said.

"You guys must be mighty nervous," Shayne said. "It's a dumb play to move in daylight."

"I said shut up," the hold-up man said.

But Shayne saw that the man was nervous.

Soon his hands were untied, and his feet, and the small man pushed him and Lucy toward the door into the living room. The hold-up man walked backwards through the door until Shayne and Lucy were in the living room. Then the gunman motioned with his pistol.

"Move."

Shayne walked slowly beside Lucy, his eyes scanning the large room. The holdup man was behind him. The smaller guard walked be-

side them, his gun in his belt. Then Shayne saw the rug.

It was a large throw rug in the archway between the living room and the main entrance hall. Outside the second car motor had started. Shayne saw no one else in the house.

He reached the throw rug. Suddenly, as he stepped off the rug in the entrance hall, Shayne stumbled heavily, fell to his knees.

"Hold it!" the gunman shouted behind.

Shayne scrambled up, turned to apologize, his face pale.

The gunman stepped onto the rug, alert.

Lucy screamed. "No! Don't shoot! Oh—"

And Lucy crumbled to the wood floor of the entrance hall. The small guard jumped to her, bent. The gunman let his eyes turn toward her for a split second.

Shayne bent and jerked the rug with all his might.

The gunman went over backwards in a shattering fall.

The pistol hit, fired, and a bullet sang into the ceiling. Lucy suddenly sank her teeth into the hand of the small man who was bent over her. The man howled in agony. Shayne hurled himself onto the fallen gunman.

The gunman made one effort to rise. Shayne kicked him under the chin and heard his neck snap.

Shayne whirled. The small guard was clawing for his gun with



his bitten hand bleeding. Lucy scratched at him like a tiger. The man hurled her away. Shayne got

to him and kicked the gun from his hand. Shayne bent and hit the man flush on the chin.

"Come on, Angel!"

Shayne caught Lucy's hand, bent for the gun, and stumbled as fast as he could for the stairs.

Shayne and Lucy went up the stairs—fast. Shayne half dragged the brown-eyed woman.

The downstairs door burst open and a shot splintered wood from the stairs.

Then Shayne and Lucy made the cover of the second floor hallway. Shayne fired two quick shots down toward the door.

Then there was only silence in the house.

XIV

MIKE SHAYNE listened in the silence. He could hear them in the living room. They were working over the two Shayne had jumped.

"Gilley!" Shayne called down. "Macjic!"

There was a movement, and then silence again.

"You're through, all of you. You try to rush us, and I get you."

Silence.

Shayne listened. He checked the automatic. It had had a full clip. With only three shots gone he could get them all. Unless they came all at once, but he did not think they would. They were hold-up men, not soldiers.

Shayne listened and heard whis-

pers. The harsh whispers of men making plans.

"You're through, boys, all of you. You better run. Maybe you can make it. You better forget about that Haitian yacht, though. I'll have that covered two minutes after you run."

The whispers below grew angry. Then they were no longer whispers. They were the angry shouts of frightened men.

"We've got to get them!" Gilley said, shouted.

"You get them," Macjic said. "I thought you didn't want any killing?"

"The situation has changed. They know the alternate plan. We have to kill them now," Gilley almost screamed.

"Your damn plan is shot anyway," someone else said.

"Not if we get them! Rush them, you cowards! What did I bring you in for? Rush them! Kill them!"

Then Macjic's cold voice. "You rush them, Gilley. He'd get some of us for sure. Be brave."

"I planned this, you stupid ape! I hired you to do the fighting. Now you earn your money! If we don't kill Shayne and the woman we're through. They'll take us one by one!"

Gilley's voice was almost hysterical. Desperation gave the salesman-turned-thief a frantic sound. Desperation and fear that oozed from his voice like blood from a dying snake.

Shayne listened, gripped his automatic, and waited for what would come from the silence below. After Gilley's last outburst there was only silence. Then Macjic's voice came again. Low now, and colder than it had ever been.

"We're through anyway, Gilley," the leader of the gunmen said softly. "You and your plans. Shayne knows it all, and the cops'll figure it out. Time's run out, smart man. Your big plans are through."

There was another silence. Shayne listened, his grey eyes narrowed, alert. Suddenly Gilley's voice rose almost to a thin scream.

"No! Where are you going? Just kill them and we'll be safe! I have friends. We'll be protected! Stop! I said stop, come back, you won't get ten miles—"

Again silence. A heavy, charged silence. Then the quiet, soft, cold voice of Macjic.

"You and your stupid plans, big man."

The two shots echoed through the old frame house like the sound of a hammer in a great hollow space. Explosions that bounced and reverberated up the stairwell and along the hallway where Shayne and Lucy crouched.

Before the echoes died there was another sound below, the sound of a door closing.

In the upstairs hallway Shayne and Lucy looked at each other, and waited. Nothing moved below. Then car motors revved up outside

in the yard of the old house. There was a squeal of tires against gravel, and then a steady and fading crunch of wheels against gravel. The car motors faded in the distance.

In the house there was total silence and nothing moved anywhere. Mike Shayne stood up slowly and moved to where he could look down over the stair railing to the entrance hall below. He saw nothing. He turned and motioned to Lucy.

"They've gone, Angel," Shayne said.

"Are you sure, Michael?"

"I'm sure, Angel. Macjic and his men are professionals. We're no more danger to them than anyone now. They'll revert to their normal ways now and make a run for it."

Shayne led the way down the wide stairs, across the entrance hall, and into the living room. The detective stopped in the archway into the living room. Lucy came up beside him and gave a small cry.

The body of Max Gilley lay on its back in the middle of the throw rug Shayne had used to such great effect. A pool of blood spread out all across the rug. Gilley's eyes stared up at nothing—at the shattered shreds of his big plans.

Gilley had been shot twice in the chest. Either shot would have killed him. Lucy turned away, her face white.

"Easy, Angel. He was behind the whole deal. He had you kid-

naped and he robbed his own company. He had to end up this way sooner or later."

Lucy nodded, but went out into the entrance hall and sat on a straight chair, and took deep breaths.

"You all right, Angel?" Shayne asked.

Lucy nodded. "I will be, Michael. I can't stand violence or blood. The poor, stupid man."

Shayne went to the telephone and called Gentry. Then he looked around the house for the stolen jewels, but, of course, they were gone.

Twenty minutes later Gentry and his men arrived. The gruff chief was all smiles when he saw Lucy.

"Now you stay out of trouble from now on, young lady," Gentry growled to Lucy. "I can't have you working us so hard."

"Yes, Chief Gentry," Lucy said with a twinkle in her brown eyes.

Gentry looked at the body of Max Gilley. "He got in with hard boys, and he wasn't as tough as he thought."

"That's the story," the redhead said.

"That and the fact that he tried to fool you," Gentry said. "Too clever, like all amateur crooks. His kidnap of Lucy just drew attention."

Shayne frowned. "Not such a

bad plan, Will. If I had been here all along, I think I would have thought of the Haiti deal even sooner. He almost made it. Another half an hour and we would have lost him."

Gentry nodded. "Yeh. Only now he's the big loser. And we'll have the others soon."

Gentry was a little wrong, and so was Max Gilley. Macjic and his three companions were not picked up soon, and they got a lot more than ten miles from Miami. In fact, they got well over two thousand miles away.

All but Macjic himself were picked up trying to cross from California into Mexico. Macjic was eventually picked up by the Mexican police in a seedy dirt town in Baja California. He made no fight, and he was still carrying the case of stolen jewels.

The Coast Guard reported that the Haitian yacht cruised off the Florida coast all the night of the day Max Gilley died. At dawn it turned and steamed off toward the east. A woman was seen at the stern looking back. No one ever knew who she was.

Max Gilley's wife cried for some time.

Markham, and Pinter had to get another sales partner.

Lucy Hamilton was back at work at nine o'clock the next morning, and Mike Shayne slept late.

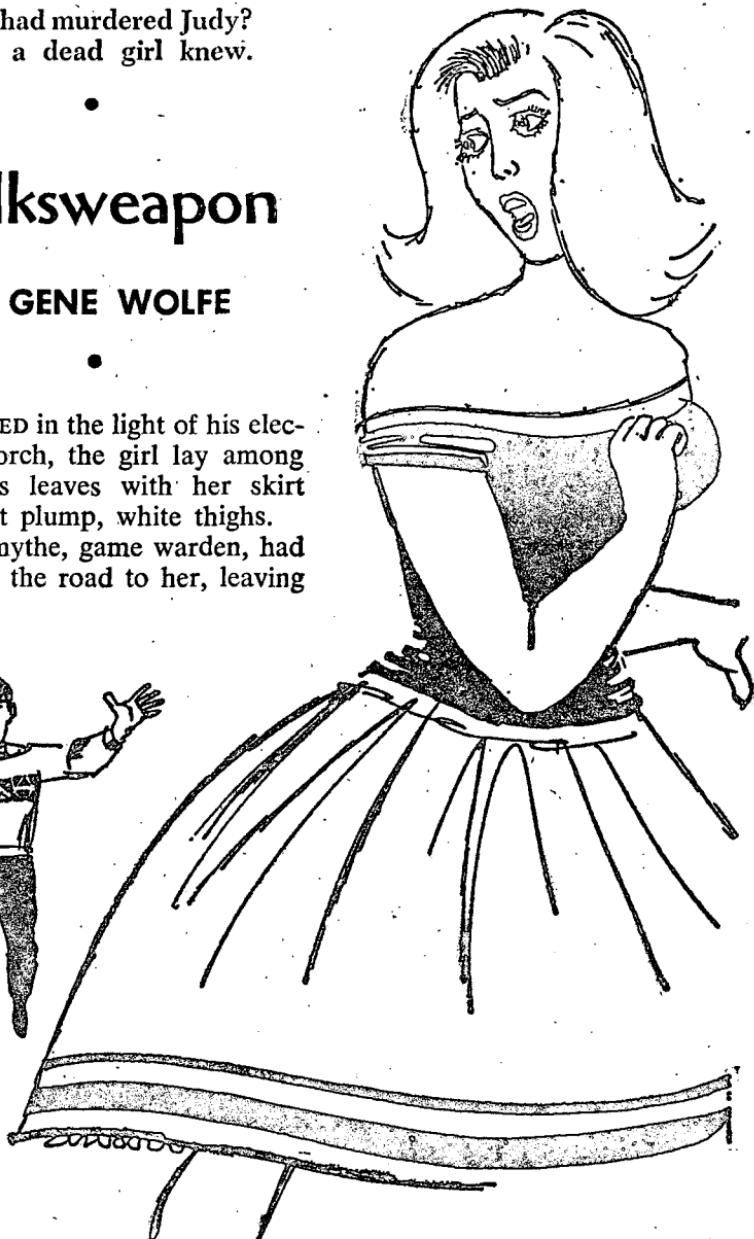
Who had murdered Judy?
Only a dead girl knew.

Volkswagen

by GENE WOLFE

CENTERED in the light of his electric torch, the girl lay among last year's leaves with her skirt hiked past plump, white thighs.

Wilt Smythe, game warden, had run down the road to her, leaving



the moon-faced young man who had apparently been her escort as soon as he had examined his wound, fearing that the girl might be more seriously hurt—perhaps dying. But she was dead.

Three small, powder-rimmed bullet holes were almost lost in her blonde hair.

None had bled much, and none of the bullets had forced its way through her skull to make a messy exit wound, but they had penetrated the brain, and been as deadly to her as big game slugs or artillery shells might have been.

"Who are you?" the boy said behind him.

"I'm a game warden. What went on here?"

The boy seemed in better control of himself now than he had been a few minutes ago, although he still clutched his bleeding side and his breath came in gasps.

"Judy and I came out here to park—you know. Then all of a sudden there was this fellow at Judy's window with a gun. It's her car, so she was driving. He said something, and she kind of screamed and tramped on the accelerator. I guess she was trying to turn the car around, but she dropped one wheel off into the ditch. You can't get it out. I just tried."

"I know. I heard the motor roaring as I came up. Take it easy now, son, and talk slow."

"Anyway, I jumped out of the

door on my side and ran around the front of the car at him and he shot me. It was just like somebody had kicked the legs out from under me. I must have passed out, because when I woke up Judy was like this and he was gone."

"Did you get a look at him? Could you describe him at all?"

Although he was obviously in pain, the boy shrugged his shoulders. "I didn't get a good look. About my age, I guess. Maybe a little shorter than I am."

"Have you any idea of how long you were unconscious?" A puff of warm night wind touched the game warden's cheek, somehow hinting of a summer thunder storm to come.

"I don't think for long. Maybe five or ten minutes."

"Stay here."

Before the wounded boy could protest, Wilt Smythe had brushed past him, running with long smooth strides down the little used road until he reached the lake and the cluster of weekend cottages which were the reason for the road's existence. The moonlit expanse of the lake was unmarked by the wake of any boat.

Hurriedly he shook the doors of the cottages, but all were closed and he saw no signs of violent entry. Running again, he returned to the boy, having been gone no more than five minutes in all.

"Nobody down there to rouse," he said. "You'll have to wait here

while I hike to the highway and flag down a motorist. You're not likely to go into shock this late, but just to be safe I want you to get into the car. Sit in back, or if you can, lie down on the seat and cover yourself up."

Like a hound loath to leave a fresh scent, Smythe made a last cast around the girl's body before he left.

The fallen leaves and dry soil held no footprints, not even the girl's or his own.

He was accustomed to traveling swiftly on his own legs and he did so now, trotting easily and almost silently as he played his light over the road before him. He was a good three-quarters of a mile from the little car and the boy who held a sodden hankerchief to his side, when the lane made an abrupt turn and he saw the glimmer of lights through the trees. Acting instinctively, he switched off his electric torch.

The men with the lights were making no effort to conceal themselves and carried no rifles. Even before he could see their faces the murmur of their voices told him that one was young and the other older, and a moment later he recognized them.

Both were enthusiastic hunters, and he had recently come to suspect that neither was letting the game laws interfere too much with his sport. Now they were so deep in some discussion that he was

able to come almost within touching distance before either noticed him.

Before they had time to ask questions of their own, Smythe snapped, "How long have you two been standing here?"

The older, a lanky man whose cheeks had been deeply pitted by some skin disorder, said, "I've been here about a quarter hour, Warden. Marty just come up. You



ain't hear two hounds after a coon, have you?"

The game warden shook his head. "You're coon hunting?"

"Coon's a varment in this state, Warden. No license and no season. You know that."

The younger man, Martin, put in, "Just runnin' the dogs, really. You can see we haven't got no guns. Only we lost them dogs somewhere around the old timber trail. We each made a big circle, him east and me west, but couldn't either of us get a smell. I think them dogs have gone home."

"In the fifteen minutes you've been here, then," Smythe ad-

dressed the older man, "has anyone come down this road?"

"Nope, not a soul. What's the matter, Warden? Something wrong?"

"There's been a rape and a killing. You come with me. I think the three of us ought to be able to lift the front wheel of a Volkswagon out of a ditch."

The wounded boy was jackednifed into the rear seat of the little car when they arrived, and his pale, sweating face told plainly of the further loss of blood he had suffered while the game warden had been away.

They did not try to move him before the three of them by main strength heaved the front end back up onto the road. While the warden was starting the engine and making a U turn in the narrow confines of the road, both hunters hastened over to peer with morbid curiosuty at the silent, huddled figure on the leaves.

Rolling down the window, the game warden yelled back to them, "Come on, you two. You're going into town with us."

"Look here, Warden." It was Martin, holding out a shiny object not much bigger than a pack of cigarettes. "This was laying right along side of her. It was mostly under some sticks and trash, but I seen it right away."

He displayed his find proudly, illuminating it with the lantern he held in his other hand. It was a

tiny chrome plated automatic of Belgian make.

"I suppose you've ruined any finger-prints that might have been on it." Using the tips of his fingers, Smythe picked up the little weapon by the trigger guard and dropped it into one of the pockets of his khaki shirt.

The older hunter asked, "Shouldn't one of us stay here with the girl?"

"No. You sit beside me here in front. Martin, you get in back and do anything you can for that fellow. You got enough room back there?"

"Sure, I'll just squeeze in on the floor here. Kinda cramped, but I'll make it."

The boy said weakly, "Somebody ought to stay with Judy."

"That's out." Smythe gunned the little car's engine. "And there sure isn't room to take her with us, not even if we could disturb the body." Heavily laden and driven at high speed, the VW jolted abominably on the uneven road.

"You think Marty or me did this, don't you?" the older hunter asked.

"You said no one came down the road, and there wasn't anyone in the summer cabins or out on the lake. The man who did this could have been on foot and cut through the woods without meeting either you or Martin or me—Martin and I both seem to have been wandering around not too

far off when this thing happened, but I don't think it's likely. Do you?"

"Well, I feel sorry for the girl."

"She was one of those college girls," Martin put in. "I didn't know her, but I've seen her around town."

"She was wearing engagement and wedding rings," the game warden said. Addressing the wounded boy in back, he asked, "You weren't her husband, were you, son?"

The car swung on to the paved state highway to town and picked up speed as the boy told them the girl's husband had been an Air Force officer stationed in Europe and it was none of their damned business.

Martin gaffawed and the men in front told him to shut up.

At the hospital a pair of efficient young men in white pulled the boy out of the car and hustled him on a stretcher to an emergency room for a blood transfusion. The game warden spoke grimly into a telephone and the two hunters leaned against a wall in the uncomfortable positions of men who feel they ought to be doing something without knowing what it is they ought to do.

"The police will be coming for him soon," Wilt Smythe said when he had finished his call. "They'll want to talk to us too, so we'd better wait right here."

Surprisingly, Martin was the

first to grasp the implications of what he had said. "You mean he done it?"

The game warden nodded.

"Well, he didn't shoot himself, did he?" the older hunter asked.

"I doubt it. Did you happen by any chance to notice the markings on that gun?"

"Sure," the hunter said. "Some kind of foreign writing."

"French. Those little automatics are imported into this country by the thousand, but the ones produced to send here are stamped in English. This one," Smythe tapped his pocket, "was intended for sale in Europe. Those Air Force men can always hitch a ride back home on a military plane when they get a leave, and I think we'll find out eventually that the girl's husband bought this gun for her in Europe and gave it to her to protect herself with."

"I suppose that she and that fellow were driving out to one of the summer cottages on the lake—maybe not for the reasons you would think. She dropped that wheel into the ditch some way—maybe he was bothering her. When they got out to look at it he attacked her. When it was over he let her up and let her get back into the car, figuring she'd be too ashamed to tell anybody and that was his big mistake. She had that little gun; probably it was either in her purse or the map compartment of the car."

"And she was mad enough to shoot him with it. Those twenty-five's don't have any punch to speak of, though, and since all the bullet did was rip a furrow in his belly muscles he was able to wrestle the gun away from her and kill her with it.

"The first thing that made me wonder about him was when he told me he'd been knocked cold for five minutes when he was shot. Of course a man might faint with fright, even if the bullet he was hit with didn't have much shock power, but he didn't look that type; and although he was bleeding pretty bad there wasn't any one puddle of blood where he might have been lying that long."

Martin said wonderingly, "Then you knew all along, huh?" An ambulance came clanging up to the emergency entrance and there was a rush of interns through the corridor.

"No, I straightened out a lot of it on the drive in. Of course the main thing was your finding that gun in the leaves. I had looked all around the girl before, and I knew good and well there wasn't any chrome plated gun there then. He'd had it in his pocket when he talked to me the first time of course, and he got scared that it would be found on him."

"Well," the older hunter said slowly, "if you knew it wasn't us, I still don't think it was right for you to take us with you like you did.

One of us could at least have stayed with the body until the police came."

"In the first place," the game warden said, "the police wouldn't want anybody rooting around after more evidence before they got there. In the second, somebody's been jacklighting deer out there, and I've got kind of interested in that. You know how it goes, don't you? The jacklighter shines a lamp or the headlights of a car into the woods and kind of hypnotizes the deer. Since the deer's eyes reflect the light, your poacher has a perfect target; the range is short and the deer's not moving. Usually your jacklighter uses a car and you can stop him on the road with the carcass in his trunk.

"Recently, though, there's been two men working together and packing the deer out on foot, and that's a lot harder to catch. Now any hunter'll tell you a rifle gets in a man's way a good deal when he's trying to tote a deer carcass, but a jacklighter doesn't really need one—he can use something a good bit handier."

With a movement almost as deft as that of a magician taking an egg from a child's ear, the game warden thrust his hand into the side pocket of the hunter's coat and came up with a stubby, two-barreled pistol.

"A three-fifty-seven derringer," Smythe commented drily. "Plenty of punch for head shots on deer at

short range, and weighs less than a pound."

The hunter's face flushed, making the pits in his cheeks more apparent than ever. "Listen here, Warden. Just my having that in my pocket ain't proof of killing deer with it. You take me to court with that and they'll laugh at you."

"That's right," Wilt Smythe agreed, "but here in town," he tapped the white hospital wall significantly, "having it in your pock-

et is carrying a concealed weapon.

"Now I suppose this gun cost you about thirty or forty dollars, which is just about what a judge would fine you for first offence poaching. I think I'll just keep it and drop it in the lake the next time I'm out there. We'll call that square."

Smythe looked at the chunky little gun reflectively. "She'd have let daylight into him with this. I wish I could have given it to her."



MIKE SHAYNE LEADS NEXT MONTH'S HEADLINERS WITH—

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THE ROSE HAS MANY ENEMIES

*Red as blood were the roses, in her garden
of haunting beauty. Young Miss Tearose
raised rare flowers. And other things.
Four dead men could tell about that . . .*

by HAL ELLSON



THE MORNING HAD the promise of fire in it, but now it was cool on the shadowed walks, cool and silent, block after block. Then came the sound, the whine of a lawn mower, and the stillness shattered like glass, splintered the morning.

A quiet neighborhood here, sedate, cushioned by money and populated by people whose problems were minor.

Sullivan spat. A bad night had left a bad taste in his mouth but, at least the painful throbbing in his head was leaving him in this atmosphere of peace. Far away now he heard the lawn mower. Walk slow. Enjoy the fleeting moments of this rare morning. Up ahead, through a leafy arcade, he saw the dark red flowers spilling over a hidden trellis, roses stained

A LONG NOVELET OF BROODING TERROR



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the deepest of all reds. Even from the distance he knew this was the house.

Rose Tearose, he thought, smiling to himself. Impossible name? Not entirely. The woman was probably a spinster, doomed to that estate by the very name wished upon her at birth.

We shall see, he mused, moving on, the dark fire of the climber glowing brighter in the morning.

Sullivan paused in front of the house, stared at the garden, then looked up. A series of rose-windows at the second-story and attic levels.

Odd, he thought.

But where was Miss Tearose? Not in the garden, not on the porch, nor visible at a window. No matter. Presently he'd meet her. And the missing gardeners? Four men had vanished into thin air. Murdered by a nice old lady whose hobby was roses? Hardly, he thought, and with a last glance at the house, he went on his way.

June prevailed this Monday morning, but not in the precinct house. Least of all in Captain O'Connor's office. The air was frigid there. The captain leaned across his desk.

"Mrs. Doolittle called again," he said abruptly.

Not unexpected. The woman had been on his back for weeks.

"You still believe her story?" Sullivan wanted to know.

"It doesn't matter what I be-

lieve," O'Connor snapped. "She pays her taxes and has a right—"

"To waste our time?"

"Her husband disappeared."

"Husbands sometimes do, but her delusion is that he was murdered by another woman."

O'Connor struck the desk with his fist. "Get her off my back."

"All I can do is try, Captain."

"Good. A little attention should calm her down."

"It may, but I doubt it. After all, she may be right. Her husband could have been murdered."

The captain's brows came up. "What makes you say that?" he asked.

"I've been checking. There were four gardeners at the Tearose place. Each worked a month and vanished. Mr. Doolittle was the last. Odd?"

"You say they apparently vanished."

"An employment agency sent them to Miss Tearose. The men never went back to the agency after they left her. They didn't have to, of course, but four of them? The agency thought it unusual. I'm dropping in today to get the particulars," Sullivan said and stood up.

He went to the door and turned. "By the way, I looked over the Tearose place yesterday. Very beautiful. Miss Tearose is a rosarian, you know."

"A what?"

"She raises roses."

"Ah, yes. My favorite flower."

"The lady knows how to grow them. They're all over her place."

"You're trying to get at something. What?"

Sullivan grinned. "Well, someone like that, who loves flowers and gives them so much care, isn't usually associated with murder."

"Not usually," O'Connor admitted.

Outside the precinct house, Detective Joseph Kelly squinted at his partner.

"Where away?" he asked.

"An interview with Mrs. Doolittle."

"You can't be serious. The woman's off her crock."

"No doubt of that, Joe."

"Then why bother?"

"Orders from his majesty. Besides, I'm interested."

"In what? The aspects of female hysteria?"

Sullivan shook his head. "Wrong guess. The theme is roses."

Kelly looked at his partner suspiciously. "You must be kidding."

"No. Roses it is. How much do you know about them?"

"Not much. But what's to know about them?"

"The question I'm always afraid to ask about anything. But right now, Mrs. Doolittle. Let's call on the lady."

SYCAMORES AND bay-windowed grey prim houses all of a kind lined the street.

"Number Twenty," Sullivan said, stepping from the car. "Coming?"

Kelly nodded. They crossed the street, rang and waited. Seconds later the door opened; a small dumpy woman confronted them. "Yes?"

"Mrs. Doolittle?"

"Yes. What did you want?" The question put and answered, the lady performed as expected: she began to shake like a leaf.

"Good act," whispered Kelly sardonically.

Sullivan thought otherwise and took the lady's palsied hand to lead her into the living room and a couch. A few sobs escaped her, then transformation. Kelly looked startled. As quick as it started the sobbing ended; up came the Doolittle chin, blue eyes flashed. A woman of fifty, small bones fleshed out by time and a taste for sweets. Must have been trim and pretty once. Quick-tempered too, Sullivan thought.

"Making a damn fool of myself," she said. "But I'm all right now. I'm glad you came. You've got to do something. That Tearose woman—" The small tight mouth barely moving but expelling words with astonishing speed and considerable venom.

Sullivan politely halted her, said he'd deal with the Tearose woman later and queried her about her husband.

"He had no reason to leave me,"

she snapped. "As for another woman? Jim? If he had one, I'd have known about it. You can bet on that."

"Perhaps, but—"

"There's no perhaps and no but about it. Jim would have told me himself. That's the kind of man he was."

Sullivan smiled. Her assurance was delightful, even if it happened to be based on delusion.

"Did your husband ever mention Miss Tearose?" he asked.

"Did he ever? That's all he talked about. Her and her ways. He thought she was crazy, and I believe he was a bit afraid of her."

"Did he say why?"

"Not in so many words, but he left that impression. Weird, he said she was, with her talk and her ideas. And he had no fancy for her house. The museum, he called it. One time she came down the stairs with a whole mess of roses sticking out of her hair."

"She told him she was La Rose, or something like that. He couldn't pronounce it, and she was always offering him drinks. Sweet gagging stuff that he didn't like. A mad-woman, that's what she is, and she knows what happened to Jim."

Sullivan nodded and thanked her. "We'll be questioning Miss Tearose," he said.

"A crazy woman. She murdered Jim. She—"

Outside the house Kelly shook his head. "Two of them."

"Two what?" Sullivan wanted to know.

"Doolittle and Tearose. Both of them are nuts."

Sullivan chuckled. At the least, Miss Tearose was eccentric, if Mrs. Doolittle had told the truth. He climbed into the car, Kelly got behind the wheel. "What's the address?"

"Apex Employment agency. Kings Road and—"

"You're not seeing Miss Tearose?"

"The employment agency first."

The Apex agency manager, Mr. Rivington, nodded to Sullivan. "Yes, from our agency, four men. Mr. Doolittle was the last. I feel somewhat guilty, you know. Did something I don't usually do."

"What's that?" Sullivan asked.

"I lied, and a lie always comes back to roost. You see, Mr. Doolittle didn't qualify for the job."

"But you sent him to Miss Tearose."

"True. She kept pressing me. A very persistent woman. What could I do? I sent Doolittle."

"What happened to the others?"

"They worked and quit."

"Why did they quit?"

Mr. Rivington shrugged. "I couldn't say, and Miss Tearose didn't. She just called and asked for another gardener. A funny thing; she didn't want married men."

"Mr. Doolittle was married."

"Yes, I know. I told him, if he

wanted the job, he'd have to lie."

"You couldn't have sent someone else?"

"Gardeners are hard to come by. I had to send someone, and Doolittle was willing."

Sullivan nodded. "Do you know why Miss Tearose asked for single men?"

Mr. Rivington frowned. "Don't know," he finally said. "It didn't make sense. Married men are more dependable but, I suppose, she had her reasons."

"At the present time she has no gardener?"

"No, and she wants another but, as I said, they're hard to come by, especially at this time of the season."

"In that case, you'll hold the job for me."

Mr. Rivington arched his brows. "You must be joking."

"Not at all. Now the names and addresses of the three men besides Doolittle who worked for Miss Tearose."

Mr. Rivington arose, went to his files and returned with three cards. He handed them to Sullivan and said, "You may have some difficulty with McManus and Thomas. Both gave the same address on the Bowery. Fellows like that work up a little stake and usually drift on."

Sullivan nodded and examined the cards. "What about Smith?"

"Young fellow from Chicago. Said he wanted to earn some money for college." Mr. Rivington



shrugged. "Like the others, he didn't last very long."

Sullivan asked permission to keep the cards and passed them on to Kelly. The two detectives left. Outside at the curb Sullivan didn't get into the car.

"Going to the library," he explained. "I'll meet you at the Harp and Shamrock. The usual time."

"What's in the library?" Kelly said suspiciously.

"Books."

"What I thought. I suppose you want me to check these characters?" Kelly held up the cards.

"It's probably a waste of time. I

don't think you'll find them. See you later, Joe."

"Wait. You're taking the gardener job?" asked Kelly.

"That's right."

"When?"

"Soon as I come from the library."

"What's the connection?" asked Kelly.

"A bit of research on roses. I believe I'll need it."

Roses? Kelly had heard enough. Quickly he climbed into the car and drove off.

AT NINE-THIRTY that evening Sullivan entered the Harp and Shamrock. There were circles under his eyes, and his face was gaunt. He went to a booth and Kelly followed, carrying his glass from the bar. "You're late. What happened?"

"Just came from the library." Sullivan let out his breath. "I'm beat and half blind. God knows how many books I poured through."

"Find what you were looking for?" Kelly asked and surmised in advance the answer by the half-cynical, half-amused look he received.

"You never find what you're looking for," Sullivan said. "You always find more, fragments scattered everywhere. Strange, but finally they all come together."

"I know," said Kelly. "And what about the gardener's job?"

"I start tomorrow. What about you? Find anything?"

"Nothing at all on McManus and Thomas. They never went back to the Bowery flophouse after quitting Miss Tearose."

"And the college kid?"

"A boarder with a Mrs. Crocket. The same with him. He never returned to his room. In fact, his belongings are still there, including an expensive valise, record player, a closet full of good clothes. Mrs. Crocket couldn't understand why he left."

"Four men," Sullivan nodded. "All worked for Miss Tearose and vanished the day they quit her."

"You want to make something out of that?" Kelly asked.

"Let's say I'm going to try."

"Oh, come off it. Two bums don't go back to their flop. That's not unusual. And a young fellow leaving his belongings behind in a room. That happens. As for Mr. Doolittle, with a wife like that, no wonder he took off."

"As simple as that, hey?" Sullivan shook his head. "I think not."

"Don't tell me you think Miss Tearose did away with four men?"

"It's possible. Anything is. Anyhow, I'm going to find out."

"A waste of time." Kelly shook his head. "And you a gardener. What do you know about roses?"

"More than you think, and less than I thought," Sullivan answered with a grin. "I've grown roses, you know, and with some success. But

Miss Tearose is a fancier, so I boned up at the library and discovered the vastness of my ignorance."

"So you were duly humiliated, but what has that to do with the supposed murder of four men?"

"Frankly, I don't know," Sullivan admitted. "But it may help. Anyway, I'm better equipped to be a gardener."

"Amen," said Kelly, reaching for his glass.

Good weather prevailed, the languidness of June, green everywhere, touched by shadow and flecked with gold. Sullivan abandoned his car. A half-mile walk to Miss Tearose's place, pleasant morning stretch, marvelous passage through tree-lined streets, past wide lawns and gracious houses. But four men missing, possibly murdered . . .

Up ahead a giant climber flamed in the sun, weighted with countless blood-red blooms. The Tearose masterpiece. Sullivan paused, stared, walked on.

A third of the block was the property of Miss Tearose. Fine house, the rose-windows looking down, not on a lawn but a rose-garden; brilliant display. Four men missing, Sullivan mused. Where did they go? Who murdered them? A little old lady, lover of roses?

Colored slate, blue, black, red, marked the path to the house. The porch was desolate, shadowed windows empty. Sullivan halted,

seeing no one, but feeling a presence and turning. Nothing but roses drowsing in the soft yellow light, then a bonnet of straw rising and a face surprisingly young and attractive. And with the bluest of blue eyes.

"Yes? Did you want something?"

"Miss Tearose?" he said.

She admitted to the name and said, "What can I do for you?"

The Apex agency had sent him, he explained. He was ready to work. The blue eyes studied him from head to toe, lifted again. A faint smile ghost-rippled across Miss Tearose's face.

"You're an experienced gardener?"

A lie if he said so, and a lie could spring a trap. The blue-blue, not-so-innocent eyes of Miss Tearose told him that.

"My experience is strictly amateur," he said.

The ghost-smile rippled again, the blue eyes probed. "Sometimes amateurs know more than professionals. What do you know of roses?"

"Not very much and, I suspect, there's much to know."

The remark acknowledged with a look of surprise.

"Yes, very much," said Miss Tearose, measuring him again. "You're young and strong. May I see your hands?"

"Of course." He lifted, turned them, looked at her questioningly.

"Where did you last work, Mr. Sullivan?"

"In a bank."

"And why did you leave?"

"A boring job."

"But clean. If you work for me—"

"Garden dirt is clean dirt."

Again the ghost-smile rippled, then Miss Tearose turned to survey the garden.

"Very beautiful," Sullivan remarked almost in a whisper.

She stared, lost in herself, then turned to him, a measure of hostility in her voice. "Now say it, Mr. Sullivan."

"Say what?"

"That I have a green thumb."

The hostility low-keyed, but still evident. Was she setting a trap? Sullivan grinned to himself.

"Myth of the green thumb," he answered. "An idea promoted by those who don't understand plants."

Miss Tearose smiled. "An interesting reply. Please go on."

"A green thumb is work, care and knowledge, not magic."

Miss Tearose nodded, looked at him with respect. "You understand, and not too many do," she said. She nodded again. "People have lost touch with the earth, and you can't do that. You must always go back to the earth. You—" Suddenly she stopped, smiled, as if embarrassed. "Ah, I'm lecturing. Didn't mean to. Come. Look at my roses."

BOTTLES GLINTED in soldierly array behind the Harp and Shamrock bar.

"You're late," Kelly said to his partner, who'd just come through the door.

Sullivan nodded, lifted a finger to McGinnis behind the bar. "Rosolio."

McGinnis, one of the best, a hulking man with wild black eyebrows, drew back affronted. "If it's hair-tonic you want, you're in the wrong pew."

"Rosolio is what I want and it's tonic, though not for the hair but a cordial to soothe throat and stomach."

"And what kind of bloody drink is that?" McGinnis asked in total innocence.

"A fragrant one of spirits, with various flavorings, such as orange-flower and cinnamon, and—"

"Enough," growled McGinnis. "It sounds like one of them damned foreign drinks that gag a man. Here." The hairy-browed one set a bottle of John Jameson and a glass on the bar.

"A man's drink," he declared and turned away.

Sullivan laughed and poured for himself the amber product of Bow Street distillery in the confines of Dublin.

"What's this rosolio business?" asked Kelly suspiciously.

"Had a few with Miss Tearose."

"Ah, you're a fast worker with the old ones."

"Old?" Sullivan wetted his tongue on the Jameson. Twelve years sleeping in casks had mellowed it to velvet.

"Who said Miss Tearose is old?" he said. "A good-looking thirty, I'd say."

"Look out. That could make her dangerous."

"All women are."

"And you drinking with her?"

"In the line of duty, my boy."

"Might slip you a real knockout if she's the murderer you think she is."

Sullivan grinned. "I made sure of what I drank and how I drank it. As for Miss Tearose being a murderer, I don't know whether she is one or not."

"You said it yourself. Four men missing after working for her. Or don't you remember?"

"I didn't forget." Sullivan stretched. "Yes, it was quite a day. Nothing like I expected. Not in the least."

"Doesn't sound like you did much gardening."

"Not much. A bit in the morning, a bit in the afternoon, then rosolio and a long, long conversation."

"A good looking woman." Kelly shook his head. "What was the jabber about?"

"Roses, mostly. An intricate and interesting subject."

"I'll bet it is." Kelly nodded. "You're working on her weakness to get around her."



"Her weakness is her strength, I'm afraid."

"Captain O should know you were discussing roses all afternoon. You'd be back on a beat."

"I might," Sullivan allowed. "But sometimes he can appreciate a subtle approach."

Kelly looked aghast. "Sometimes. But for your own good, don't tell him about the roses."

"The key to the whole business, I think. The woman's weird, probably unbalanced, living in a fantasy world of her own making. Someone like that—"

"Yes?" said Kelly.

"Might hold with some strange ideas that could lead to murder."

"And what ideas might they be?" Captain O'Connor, like Kelly wanted to know the next morning.

"I wouldn't know," Sullivan said with a shrug. "But the possibility exists. People get them, like that fellow in England who mur-

dered people to drink their blood. Sounds horrible and strange, but the idea itself isn't strange at all. In medieval times—”

“This is the year we're still in Vietnam,” Captain O'Connor said grimly.

“For some people, Captain, but not those who live in the past.”

“I see. And just why would any one wish to live in the past?”

“To escape the present or, in other words, reality.”

“Hm.” Captain O'Connor nodded. “Seems like a lot of people are doing that these days and doing no one harm.”

“Correct, but you'll admit that some do?”

“But a woman who grows roses? What's wrong with that? It's a fine healthy hobby.”

“I'm afraid it's more than that, Captain.”

“More? Do you mean it's eccentric?”

“Much more. It's a sickness. The woman's very clever, very intelligent, but sick and so taken with the subject that—”

“That nothing. Doesn't it occur to you that the lady in question may just happen to like roses?”

Sullivan grinned, tipped back in his chair and nodded slowly. “It happened to occur. It also happened to occur that one can love something beyond reason and kill for it.”

“Very amusing,” O'Connor said dryly. “I don't recall any one com-

mitting murder for the sake of a rose.”

“Nor do I,” Sullivan admitted. “But murder has been committed for less. Last week, if you recall, a man in a bar called his best friend a fool and got killed for it.”

“I know,” O'Connor said wearily. “But that was different. Now if you can show me—”

“I can't show you anything yet,” Sullivan shot back. “If you want to drop the case, say so. It's no skin off my back.”

O'Connor eyed him suspiciously, and grinned suddenly. “You're too quick on the trigger. Do you want to quit?”

“Do you want me to?”

“Do I want Mrs. Doolittle on my back?”

“And the ghost of Mr. Doolittle? Not to mention those of the three gardeners who preceded him?”

O'Connor wanted no disturbing haunts and shook his head. “You may pursue Miss Tearose, if you wish. Perhaps she did four men in. I don't know, but this stuff about the roses—tell me what that has to do with murder.”

Sullivan shook his head. “A rose is a complicated thing and, I assure you, Miss Tearose has complicated it the more. We might call her the mystic-rose.”

“Mystic-rose. What's that?”

“Better if we don't go into it.”

O'Connor's shaggy brows lifted and fell. “Roses, you say? Well, there's but three that I know of.

My Wild Irish Rose. The Rose of Tralee, and a girl who goes by the name. Get to work, man. This gets dizzier by the hour."

"**TOO HOT,**" said Miss Tearose. "My, what a change." Slowly she fanned herself. A small delicate fan of ivory, yellowing with age, opened in her hand, wing of a butterfly waving caught Sullivan's eye. Any fan rare enough these days, but this? As he looked closer, he saw it was a work of art, exquisitely carved.

Miss Tearose, aware of his attention smiled, moved the fan slower and slower, finally it stopped altogether, full-spread, a pale wing, the faint lines of its relief barely revealing the carver's design.

Sullivan squinted. "Beautiful! May I?"

"Of course." Miss Tearose, closing the fan, handed it over. He spread it again and there was—hardly a surprise—in delicate relief, a rose in full bloom.

"Beautiful. Beautiful," he murmured and raised his eyes to Miss Tearose. "It must be very old."

"Very. A family heirloom. I treasure it."

I know. I know, he thought. And the rose? What does it mean to you? What happened to the four men who vanished?

Miss Tearose took back her treasure and said, "You don't see things like this any more. Old

things are the best, don't you think?"

He nodded, agreeing, but thought, You don't see the dead, either. And fans are designed for utility by General Electric.

"Yes, it's too hot to work in the garden today," Miss Tearose said, a faint smile crinkling her eyes.

And it was hot, but not that much. Now she arose, excused herself. The screen-door closed behind her, shadow of the house enwrapped her. Silence and the sun burning the garden. Sullivan stared at it from the shadow of the porch. No answers there.

And once more the sound of the screen door breaking the silence. Miss Tearose floated toward him, a decanter in hand, two delicate crystal glasses. She set them down, poured from the decanter. A chill glass of ale his preference, or lemonade in desperation, but this florid liquor? Careful, he thought. Could be poison hidden in its rosy hue.

Miss Tearose smiled, mischief in her eye. She held her glass in a light two-fingered grip, then sipped. Quickly he followed her lead.

"What is it?" she asked, still smiling. "The same as yesterday?"

"It's not rosolio?"

"Not rosolio, but rosoli."

"Oh, yes, an Italian liquor in which the sundew, *Drosera rotundifolia*, is used."

"Ah, you surprise me with your knowledge."

"I'd surprise you more with my ignorance," he answered.

She laughed, tasted her drink again, then said, "I didn't underestimate you, you know. The moment I saw you I knew you were different."

"Everyone's different. My philosophy."

"But not mine. Anyway, the computers haven't got to you yet."

"And not going to, I believe," he said.

"Good. Another? It's very good for your blood."

"A little too sweet."

"Ice will take care of that."

"And spoil it. I'll have it as it is," he said. For social, diplomatic and other reasons, it was better to go along with her.

Did Miss Tearose invite the others to a glass or two and dispatch them with poison? And, if so, where went the bodies?

A voice came to him softly. "Mr. Sullivan, do you like rosoli?"

"Well, it's all right."

"The others didn't see it that way."

"What others?"

"My previous gardeners."

"Oh."

"They preferred beer."

"Well, to each his own."

"But you do like rosoli?"

"Second's better than the first."

"There, you are getting used to it." Miss Tearose smiled and filled his glass again, filled her own. An alcoholic? No. Her hand too

steady, mind too sharp; no fuzz there from the grape. Something else bothering her. Sex? Frightened of it without knowing? Or her romance with the past? The other side of the same coin.

"Yes, Miss Teagarden, I'm getting used to it. Good taste."

"And it's not too strong."

"But strong enough."

"Oh, I'm sure you can take it, Mr. Sullivan."

He believed so, but wasn't sure of her. That weird hungry look in her eye. He didn't like it, didn't want to be devoured whole. Nor poisoned, either. Which could happen.

"Yes, I can take it," he said and turned toward the garden. "I should be working."

"Oh, don't feel guilty. There's not much you can do in this heat."

"Not used to accepting money under false pretenses," he answered.

"You'll earn the money; don't worry about that."

A threat, or play of words? "No, no more, please." He covered his glass as she lifted the decanter.

"Take your hand away, Mr. Sullivan. That's an order."

He shrugged and allowed her to pour. The pontifical tone didn't bother him. Apparently the rosoli was taking effect on her. She spilled some, giggled, then looked at him again.

"Do you know what rosiere means? I'll bet you don't."

Pretend ignorance? No. "The rosiere is an emblem of virtue. Also it is the girl who wins the rose."

Obviously disarmed, she stared at him in astonishment, then smiled again and said, "I should have expected you'd know, and I'm so glad you're working for me. Oh, the others—clods they were. They didn't know anything."

"There's not much I know either," Sullivan put in.

"Well, you're honest. Too honest, really. But what about the girl who wins the rose?"

Asking, testing, a little inebriated perhaps, persistent as only a woman can be. Rose lips, he thought. Innocent as a girl's, and much more dangerous.

"You don't know the answer?" Miss Tearose's voice echoed her triumph, but she soon learned she was not to win.

Sullivan put on deliberately, casually citing the meager facts in his grasp: "On June eighth, a rose-festival celebrated at the village of Salency, France. From three girls most distinguished for feminine virtues one is selected, her name being announced from the pulpit to give opportunity for objections. If unopposed, the girl is conducted to church, where she hears service in a place of honor, after which she formerly used to open a ball with the Seigneur. This girl is called La Rosiere, and she is adorned with roses held together

with a silver clasp which was originally presented by Louis XIII."

Awe-struck, Miss Tearose gazed at him and shook her head. "I didn't know, didn't know," she murmured.

"Didn't know what?"

"That any one remembered."

"Why not?" Sullivan shrugged.

"A beautiful festival."

"But to see it, to see the girl."

"It would be something, Miss Tearose."

She filled her glass again, her own, and smiled. "Would you call me Rose? It's my first name, you know."

Odd, eccentric and over-done, but pretty, at least, and palatable, nicer, say, than Rose Schiklegruber.

"You can call me, Jim," he said, and felt the fire of the day fusing with the rosoli. The porch was rocking, the garden smoldering.

"Would you—" Miss Tearose said.

"Care to see the girl who wins the rose?" Sullivan recalled Mrs. Doolittle speaking of her husband. He had seen La Rosiere and thought her mad. Roses sticking out of her hair. Was it on a day like this, and had he and Miss Tearose indulged too deeply, emptied the potent rosy liquor in this ancient decanter?

The screen door opened. Miss Tearose led the way into the house, the spacious living-room, told him to be comfortable and made for

the stairs. A mad-woman mounting the steps, murderer—or poor eccentric doting on an innocent flower? Revolving on a hidden turntable, slowly the room came to full stop, dim now without the sun and dark with the richness of rare wood.

And footsteps sounded overhead, soft, far-away. In a medieval bedroom? he wondered. Ah, La Rosiere, selected for thy virtue, prize of the festival. But which virtue and which festival?

Soft footsteps overhead, then silence, and the arched and yawning doorway to the hall, view of the stairs, dark gleaming bannister, nothing else there, then the impossible, a startling pale and slender vision—La Rosiere in the flesh, not the churchly one of unquestioned virtues, yet endowed with those innocent pagan counterparts. Drunk, or mad? he wondered, and she stepped into the room, adorned with a crown of roses, but otherwise quite unclothed.

JOE KELLEY knocked on the door, knocked again and finally tried the knob. The door unlocked, he opened it, flicked a switch. His partner spread-eagled on the bed, clothes still on.

"Sully." Kelly shook the sleeping one. There was no response. He shook him again. "Get up, man."

Sullivan opened his eyes. "What time?"

"Ten o'clock, and you in bed. Are you sick?"

"No. A bit of a headache."

"Or a bit of a big head?"

"Same thing." Sullivan sat up.

Kelly stared at him. "No, don't tell me. A few with Miss Tearose."

"More than a few. I lost count."

Kelly leered. "All in the line of duty, I suppose? Liquor to loosen the tongue. Did she give herself away?"

"More than that, Joe."

"More? What does that mean?"

Sullivan rubbed his face and shook his head. "A long, long afternoon, and very interesting."

"I don't doubt it. But what happened? What did you find?"

"She asked me to call her Rose," Sullivan grinned.

"A few drinks and the girls will ask you to call them anything, so get to the point."

Sullivan grinned again. "A few drinks? Be assured, there were more, but it wasn't that."

"What wasn't what?" Kelly said, irritated. "And stop grinning like you swallowed the canary."

"Can't help it, Joe. The most interesting case I've ever handled."

"It almost sounds like you've fallen for Miss Tearose."

"A very intelligent woman."

"And attractive."

"Beautiful."

"Since when did you start mixing work with that stuff?" asked Kelly. "I thought it was against your principles."

"Oh, it is. But if the lady is uninhibited—"

"Don't tell me she performed a strip-tease?"

"Well, not exactly. A few roses in her hair, otherwise—"

"Come off it, man. You're joking."

"No." Sullivan shook his head. "Thought I was seeing things," he said. "There she was on the stairs, roses in her hair, otherwise as naked as she was born."

"And what did you do?"

"Nothing."

"Sure. You even closed your eyes."

"No. Something like that doesn't happen every day in the week. Didn't want to miss it. Anyway, it was pertinent that I study her."

"Pertinent?" Kelly guffawed. "I'll bet you studied her."

"I did. She seemed in a trance, I believe she was. You see, she was performing, playing a role from an ancient church festival. She wasn't even aware of what she was doing. That's what I think."

"Anyway, what happened?"

"She stepped into the living room and passed out."

"Conveniently."

"No, it was the real thing. I carried her upstairs and put her to bed. When she came to, she didn't remember a thing."

"Conveniently," Kelly said again. "Drunks always use that excuse. Covers a multitude of sins."

"I know, but she wasn't drunk.



Besides, doing what she did had nothing to do with me personally."

"Then why did she do it?"

Sullivan shrugged. "I don't know, but it wasn't normal."

"You think she's a nympho?"

"No. I'd say she has some sort of fixed idea concerning roses. It may have started with that weird name her parents hung on her. You don't know what a name can do to a person, tears them apart sometimes. Imagine her in school and her school-mates giggling, making fun. She had to live with that, and what could she do underneath but hate everyone, hate the world and retreat from it, make her own world. And that, I believe, is what she did. This afternoon she became La Rosiere, the girl who won the rose, the pagan whose virtue was naked beauty."

Kelly yawned deliberately. "You sound as mad as Miss Tearose but, tell me, what has all that to do with four missing gardeners?"

"I was coming to that. It's only a vague theory, but as I mentioned, if she came to hate everyone, then she might seek revenge."

"On the gardeners? Why them? Why not the butcher and baker?"

Sullivan paused and grinned. "If you're asking for facts, I haven't got them. But the gardeners were vulnerable if only because they were available and, if you'll recall, she wanted single men. An odd stipulation, but not if you realize that two of the four were drifters, the third a student without a family, three men whom no one would probably inquire about if they happened to vanish."

"And Mr. Doolittle?"

"He posed as single, didn't he? I think we can assume that he also told Miss Tearose he had no next of kin or he wouldn't have been hired."

Kelly nodded, impressed. The logic added up, but a quartet of corpses? "And now—why were the gardeners murdered? How were they done in?"

"I don't know if they were done in," Sullivan answered. "But if they were, I'd say poison was used."

"Why say that?"

"Why the murders?" He shrugged. "Revenge, perhaps. But that's too simple, especially with a woman like Miss Tearose. First, the idea would be boorish. Secondly, I would assume that she would use a complicated method to relieve herself of any guilt in the matter. In

other words, she might kill in such manner that she could lay the blame elsewhere and actually believe in her innocence."

Kelly shook his head. "Too complicated and too wild. I don't buy it."

"I don't blame you," Sullivan answered. "It's only a vague theory. Might be completely cock-eyed."

"Anyway, don't mention it to Captain O."

"Wouldn't think of it, Joe."

"And the action today. Miss Tearose in her birthday-suit. I wouldn't mention that either."

"Have to," Sullivan answered soberly. "After all, it happened. Still, it might shake his liver."

"He might also think you're having a ball and pull you off the case."

"In that case, I'd throw in my badge."

"No, you wouldn't."

"I would." Sullivan glanced at the clock beside his bed. Ten-past-ten the hour. Too early to go back to sleep. He stretched himself, got off the bed and said, "What about a few at the Harp and Shamrock, Joe?"

CLEAR AND COOL the June morning and cool the blue eyes of Miss Tearose when Sullivan arrived at the house. Had she forgotten yesterday, or was it truly an act? Difficult to tell.

"You're five minutes late," she noted and walked past him down

the porch steps. He followed her round to the back of the house, where she pointed out a hoe.

"The weeds spring up over night in this weather. You can start out front and be careful with that tool. Don't injure my roses."

That was all. She left him abruptly and went back in the house. The cool morning turning hot now, almost as hot as yesterday, but Sullivan found the work pleasant and didn't extend himself too much.

At eleven Miss Tearose reappeared, eyes still cool, and announced that she was going to the stores.

"I'll be back presently," she added and went off under a gay gay parasol.

Waiting till she was out of sight, Sullivan dropped the hoe and went to the back of the house. The screen door locked, but a latch was no barrier. His knife did the trick.

Quickly he went to the living room. All there was the same as yesterday. As he looked around, not knowing what he was looking for, his eye caught the stairs. Something up above?

Seconds later he stood at the top of the stairs in momentary quandary. Too many doors and too many rooms and not enough time. The sombre tones of a clock led him to a bedroom—Miss Tearose's, obviously. Roses in a vase, their scent in the air and on a dark marble-topped bureau a sheet of

paper. He picked it up, frowned. Two lines of verse in longhand.

*"Under the rose, since we are
but friends,*

*(To own the truth) we have
some private ends."*

Still frowning, he read the lines again. What did they mean? Best to copy them. He did and surveyed the room again. The window closed, chill air here, odor of age under the heavy scent of cut roses, those savage red blooms. Something off. What? The gloom and emptiness of a crypt, hot yellow light drained pale and lifeless sifting through the window-shade. Raise it. Look around.

Well, wouldn't you know. Not that it had come to life but, at least, the room brightened, flushing the dark wallpaper to rose-pink and there, hardly unexpected, the motif, the simplicity of a wild rose repeated over and over.

Outside the window, a flash of blue, then a shriek, a jay in pursuit of a scrawny sparrow. Sullivan lowered the shade, left, went down the stairs and out of the house.

"Mr. Sullivan." The voice was sharp. Lost in thought, he hadn't heard Miss Tearose approach. Startled, he veered around to face her. The blue eyes searched his and were no longer cool.

"Day-dreaming, or tired?" she said.

"A little of both," he answered, and she surveyed the garden, then nodded in approval of his work and

said, "It's much too hot. Better get out of the sun and relax."

With that, she led him to the porch and vanished inside the house.

Now what? he wondered. Another yesterday and more rosoli? But better than the burning sun. Ten minutes, then ten more and Miss Tearose appeared bearing a tray.

"A little snack," she announced, placing the tray and smiling at him.

There was mischief in her eye, a beaker of pink lemonade on the tray, jar of jam, crackers, small apothacary glass.

"To quench your thirst." Miss Tearose filled the glasses, opened the jar. "Rosehip jam," she said. "I'm sure you've tasted it before."

"Yes," he nodded and, in truth, he'd tasted it, something he could take or leave. His eyes went to the apothacary glass. Strange-looking candy within. He raised his eyes to Miss Tearose.

"Rose drops," she said.

Completely mad. Watch out for her, he thought, and she opened the container.

"Try one. I'm sure you'll like the taste."

"Lozenges flavored with rose-essence," he said, reaching into the glass.

"You've had them before?"

"Oh, yes. A favorite of my grandmother."

Miss Tearose measured him with a steady gaze. "A strange man you

are. You seem to know everything about roses."

"Oh, hardly," Sullivan said. "It's you who do."

"I thought I did till you came along."

"There's so much to learn. I'm glad I'm working here, if one can call this work."

Miss Tearose laughed softly at the jest and leaned forward to tap the table. "Don't worry; you'll earn every penny of your pay. Mind you that."

A threat? So it sounded, but like an echo, for Sullivan was taken by the ring on the tapping finger, its stone shaped like a rose. His eyes lifted. A creamy rose cameo pinned to her dress.

"Every penny," she repeated. "You'll earn them."

It was two o'clock when Miss Tearose arose from her wicker chair.

"Time to work," she announced.

Down the porch steps she went and into the garden to stoop over a thorny bush. She flicked a bug from a leaf, crushed it underfoot and turned to Sullivan.

"Dead," she said, nodding and her blue-blue eyes seemed to be looking through him. "You know," she went on, "the rose has many enemies."

"I know."

"And what are some of them?"

"Green fly, red spider, rose beetles, rose slugs," he recited.

"Terrible, terrible things."

"Insecticides help, but what is best for the rose, Mr. Sullivan?"

Stumped. She had him this time. "Best?" he said stupidly.

"Why, good health," she went on. "Health is strength. A healthy plant resists its enemies. And how can it stay healthy?"

"With proper care."

"Such as?"

"Good fertilizers."

"Now we have it, Mr. Sullivan. And just what are those fertilizers?"

"You have some special kind in mind?"

"Very special. In fact, I happen to make it myself."

"Lots of work. You can buy whatever kind you wish."

"If you could trust those who sell it, but you can't."

"The law requires that the contents be printed on the container—so much of this, so much of that."

"Of course, and the statement is always there, but who knows what's inside the bag?"

"I believe the government has inspectors who test—"

"Test?" Miss Tearose laughed. "Really, you should know better, Mr. Sullivan. Inspectors are merely men and infinitely fallible, with a special weakness when it comes to bribery."

"Well, yes, I suppose you're right."

"Oh, I am," Miss Tearose answered firmly. "Anyway, I prefer to make my own fertilizers from my own formulas."

"Which are?"

"Secrets." Miss Tearose smiled.

"My own secrets. Why do you think my roses grow so wonderfully?"

"They amaze me," Sullivan admitted. "But I didn't realize you were in possession of secret formulas. You know, they'd be worth a fortune."

"I do know, but the formulas are mine. They shall stay with me." That said, Miss Tearose turned the conversation, pointing to a rambler trained to a trellis. "And what does that remind you of?" she asked.

Sullivan frowned and shrugged, while Miss Tearose wagged a finger at him. "I'm surprised at you. It's a rosary. You're Catholic, aren't you?"

"So I am." "And what is a rosary to you?"

"A garland of roses to crown the image of the Virgin, also a chaplet of beads used in prayers in honor of Our Lady; specifically, a series of devotions consisting of a specified number of Aves, Paternosters and Glorias."

Miss Tearose regarded him slyly. "You know so much. Are you familiar with the rosy cross?"

"The crucified rose, indicated by a cross within a circle, or a rose on a cross, to denote the union of the rose with the cross."

Miss Tearose paled, but continued to smile. "And knowing that," she said, "you must know more."

"A little," he admitted. "I suppose we are coming to a gentleman who was known as Christian Rosenkreuz."

"Go on, Mr. Sullivan."

"The mythical name of the mythical founder of the sect which called itself after the man—the Rosicrucians."

"Christian Rosenkreuz, Mr. Sullivan, was not a myth."

"Nor did I say so. The name was assumed by the theologian, Johann Valentin Andrea."

"You are familiar with his book?"

"The Fama Fraternitatis. Some may accept it as serious."

"And you?"

"A satire on that be-nighted age when Andrea breathed."

"Then you don't believe—"

"No, Miss Tearose, not in any society, secret or otherwise, which combines pretensions to the possession of occult wisdom and gifts with so-called mysteries of physic, astronomy, alchemy or what have you."

"Paracelsus was a member of the fraternity, Mr. Sullivan."

"A very learned man, but also swayed by the occult. His quest to convert ordinary metals into gold, one element into another—"

"Failed?" Miss Tearose shook her head. "It is you who have failed. Yes, the early Rosicrucians experimented in transmutation, but the principles were not merely confined to the changing of gross met-

als into gold, but of the grosser elements of human nature into higher spiritual qualities."

"Ah, but I am aware of those experiments," Sullivan replied. "And human nature being what it is and always will be, the experiments failed."

"Did they? Then we don't see eye to eye, Mr. Sullivan. But no matter. We're wasting time. If you'll come along. You want to earn your pay."

And to the rear of the house she led him, then down into the dank cellar, where a strange odor pervaded the air. He turned to Miss Tearose.

In the dim light she smiled at him. "That odor? Nothing but rose-vinegar, to dispel unpleasant smells."

As that of bone-meal, he thought, and Miss Tearose pointed to a shovel, then to two mounds, one black, the other white as snow. "If you will mix those two piles thoroughly," she said, "then carry it all up to the yard. Tomorrow you'll apply it to the roses."

"Your secret formulas are here?"

"As if you didn't know," Miss Tearose answered and left him standing there.

DETECTIVE KELLY was waiting patiently at the Harp and Shamrock when his partner arrived just after dark.

"Well, what happened?" Sullivan asked.

"I got into the house all right," Kelly said morosely. "But, God, what a wait! You and Miss Tearose gabbing in the garden all that time."

"Yes, yes, we wore your patience down, but what did you get?"

"A bit of a scare. She almost caught me. I went out a window. A spooky house that."

"Different, at least." Sullivan laughed. "Now out with the goods."

"Goods?" Kelly looked abashed. "What was I to look for? Something odd, queer, bizarre. Well, the whole house struck me as that and more. The woman's mad."

"I know, but you found something?"

"A kind of diary in her bedroom."

"You didn't lift it, I hope?"

"No. I copied a few items, though they don't make sense to me," Kelley said and handed over a sheet of paper.

A thick blunted scrawl. Sullivan squinted, read aloud haltingly: "To have a man chased to death in such manner by poison after poison, first roseaker, then arsenick, then mercury sublimate again, it is a thing would astonish man's nature to hear it. Bacon. Accusations of Wentworth, 1615."

"And what's that all about?" asked Kelly.

"I don't know, but roseaker. Interesting."

"Why?"

"It probably intrigued Miss Tearose."

"What's roseaker?"

"Blue vitriol."

"I'm still in the dark."

"I'm losing myself. Oh, but listen to this. Bone for white, blood for red, and fat and flesh fused together for creamy yellow."

"I fail to follow," groaned Kelly.

"Listen. From gross elements, beauty, blood for the red passion of the rose, bone for pure white petals, flesh and fat for perfect yellow."

"Sounds morbid, a sick poetry. Is Miss Tearose a bohemian?"

"She's sick, but in her own way. What did you get from those lines?"

Kelly shrugged. "Nothing but a slight nausea."

"You copied them. Why?"

"I thought they'd interest you."

"They do. They do. Vastly interesting."

Kelly sat grinning, shaking his dark head. "You expect to make something out of that?"

"I might not, and might too."

"Four men missing and you still think Miss Tearose finished them off. Those nasty lines are proof?"

"Partial confirmation of a theory."

"What theory?"

"Transmutation. A medieval concept, but we won't go into that just now. Other things to do." Sullivan, fishing in a pocket, brought up a small bottle and placed it on the table. The contents ruby-red.

Kelly eyed it suspiciously. "What's that?"

"Compliments of Miss Tearose, a drink which I did not drink."

"You're saving it as a souvenir?"

"For Dr. Luther Gunther, I have a sneaking idea that he'll find its composition satisfying to his morbid interests."

"Ah, you think Miss Tearose tried to poison you?"

"I think so. Analysis will tell the story. So for this innocent-looking liquor." Sullivan pocketed it again and produced three stout envelopes.

"Fertilizer and dirt," he said.

"I'm in the dark again. Enlighten me."

"A very special kind of dirt, I believe," Sullivan explained. "And also a very special kind of fertilizer, or fertilizers, I should say; the result of secret processes known only to Miss Tearose."

"Go on, Sully. I'm not following."

"More grist for the mill of Dr. Gunther. His analysis of the stuff may prove highly interesting."

"You mean you think Miss Tearose poisoned the dirt and fertilizer?"

"Oh, no. If I'm right, the answer will be much more gruesome. But, first, the analysis by Dr. Gunther," Sullivan said. "Then the acid for his consideration."

"What acid?"

"This." Sullivan held up a sam-

ple. "Miss Tearose used it in rather large amounts. Dr. Gunther should be able to enlighten us concerning its use."

"Anything else?" asked Kelly.

"The major items have been gathered. Tomorrow should tell the tale."

Kelly cast a dubious eye at his partner. "Of course, you'll speak to Captain O before you approach Gunther?"

"That goes without saying."

"And you'll present the sample of liquor, the dirt and fertilizers a possible evidence to be used against Miss Tearose to prove she murdered four men?"

"That's the idea, Joe."

Kelly shook his head. "Odd evidence, if it is that at all," he said. "But what about that stuff in the diary? Don't tell me you're going to pull that out of the bag?"

"Oh, yes, that too. Read between the lines, there's more than meets the eye."

"Not this eye, and I doubt O'Connor will see anything. In fact, he's apt to boot you out the door, if I know him."

"Not if I tell him what's between the lines, Joe."

"If there's anything between them, and I really don't think there is."

"Well, that's to be seen, you doubting Thomas," Sullivan grinned and called to McGinnis behind the bar. "Two Irish Cream ales, and make them cold."

"Coming up," said the dark-browed keeper of the pumps.

In the cool of the morning Captain O'Connor sat behind his desk and listened with what seemed infinite patience to Sullivan's monologue of curious evidence. First, he looked puzzled, then amazed, then his pale face flooded red with anger.

"Are you sure you're not losing your bloody mind?" he finally said. "If I went to Gunther with this, he'd call the department psychiatrist and have me committed."

"Perhaps, but he won't," Sullivan argued. "The odder the case, the more he's interested, and this one, to say the least, is odd."

"Dirt, acid, fertilizer and a liquor," O'Connor growled. "He'll laugh at us."

"Four men are missing, Captain. I believe they were murdered by a madwoman called Rose Tearose. I also believe I was to be her fifth victim."

"All that junk about bones and roses you hand me and now this delusion. Come off it."

"Delusion?" The captain had made the opening, and Sullivan went through it like a streak of light. He pointed a finger at the specimen of liquor. "There it is. If you're so sure it's not what I say it is, suppose you taste it?"

The captain swallowed hard, looked at Sullivan, then at Kelly and finally at the liquor in question and shook his head.



"No, thanks," he said, conceding defeat in a tone distinctly gentle for him. With that, he rose from his desk. "Let's go see the medical examiner."

BEHIND THICK lenses, the grey eyes of Dr. Luther Gunther apparently focused on nothing, lending him an air of absolute remoteness. He did not even appear to be listening to Detective Sullivan, but poisons were the doctor's dish, and murder by poison.

Dr. Gunther's nostrils quivered when Sullivan came to the point. "Hm. Interesting," he said, nodding his head. "And this is the drink you suspect?" He uncapped the small bottle and sniffed its contents. "A very agreeable bouquet,

at least. What is it supposed to be?"

"Rosoli."

"Hm, not common in this country. And what makes you think it contains poison?"

"I have reason to believe it contains a number of poisons, Doctor."

"Such as?"

"For one, roseater. You're familiar with it?"

"Hm, yes, but I did not think you were, at least, not under that archaic name. Commonly it is called blue vitriol, but it is not commonly used as a poison."

Dr. Gunther passed the bottle to an assistant, with an order to analyze its contents immediately, and poked into one of the envelopes Sullivan had placed before him.

"Hm. Looks like good potting soil," he remarked. "It also contains poison?"

"Blood, I believe, Doctor. Human blood. And possibly flesh. Would you be able—?"

"It should not be difficult. And this envelope? Smells like bone-meal."

"Human bone-meal, I think."

"Hm." Dr. Gunther nodded and almost smiled. "Anything else?"

Sullivan handed over a third envelope and a small bottle. "Careful," he warned. "It's an acid."

Dr. Gunther uncapped the stopper carefully and whitish fumes appeared immediately along with a distinctive odor.

"Hydrochloric," he said with a shrug.

"And used for what?"

"The manufacture of glue, for one."

"And what is glue composed of?"

"Bones, hides, hoofs." Dr. Gunther pushed his glasses down to the tip of his blunted nose and grinned.

"The old horse goes to the glue factory and is reduced to a thick adhesive substance, but we are not interested in old horses, are we? We have in mind the human animal. Yes, the same process of reduction could be used to make a corpse into glue."

"And then be used as fertilizer?"

"A most excellent one, Mr. Sullivan." Dr. Gunther sniffed and pushed back his glasses, his grey eyes clouded.

"Most interesting," he remarked, almost smacking his lips with pleasure. "You suspect that four men were poisoned and turned into fertilizer?"

"Different kinds of fertilizer, Doctor."

"Hm, yes. Categories. An interesting theory of yours, but why fertilizers; and why should any one go through so much trouble? Not that a murderer wouldn't attempt such a project, understand, but to specify—"

"A hare-brained idea," Captain O'Connor put in. "Sullivan has a vivid imagination and reads too many books."

"Too many books?" Dr. Gunther drew back his head, affronted. "No one can read too many

books. As for a vivid imagination, excellent equipment for a detective, no?"

With that said and O'Connor put properly in place, the doctor turned, brows arched. "Mr. Sullivan, the question of the fertilizers. If you will please explain?"

"I'll try," Sullivan said. "First, it's my belief that the suspect, namely Miss Rose Tearose—"

"Ah, quaintly named."

"Significantly named, I think. Anyway, I have more than enough reason to believe she's quite mad, with a fixed idea about roses."

"Hm, yes, and what is this idea fixée?"

"That the proper nourishment of the plant can only be obtained by the use of human fertilizer."

"A rather morbid conception, Mr. Sullivan, "but not impossible, the human mind being capable of harboring such horrible ideas, as I should certainly know, but how did you arrive at this conception?"

As he groped for words, Dr. Gunther's assistant returned and handed him a report. He read it and lifted his cloudy eyes.

"Hm, it appears that your suspicions were correct, Mr. Sullivan. The rosoli showed the presence of roseater, arsenic and mercury sublimate in sufficient amounts to cause death. In fact, a mere swallow would prove fatal. As for the fertilizers. In envelope One, the presence of human blood is indicated. In envelope Two, the pres-

ence of human bone. In envelope Three, the mixture contains human flesh and fat."

Dr. Gunther nodded. "And you say these specimens were meant to be used as fertilizer? But why, Mr. Sullivan? I don't follow all the way."

Sullivan let out his breath. Better to quote from Miss Tearose. "From gross elements, beauty; blood for the red passion of the rose, bone for pure white petals, and flesh and fat for yellow perfection." Doctor, this was found in the suspect's diary, along with other such data."

"Very interesting. Almost poetry, but yet only words."

"The poetry of death. Miss Tearose believed what she wrote and nurtured her roses on the bodies of the men she murdered. A mad-woman, of course, with a distorted idea about transmutation, the dream of medieval alchemists who sought to turn gross metals into gold. She appropriated the idea and re-arranged it to suit her peculiar need."

"And what?" asked the doctor, "is that peculiar need?"

"One can only guess, but I would say revenge. She had to even the score for what she thought had been done to her, but she couldn't admit this to herself. She had to believe that she was refining something gross, elevating her victims to a higher plane. Thus the deception and the murder of four men."

"Whom she fed to her roses. An act of purification and cleansing of guilt. Yes, yes, very interesting."

The doctor turned to O'Connor. "Undoubtedly Miss Tearose committed murder. The evidence is here."

O'Connor had nothing to say. Mute, he moved toward the door. Sullivan and Kelly trailed him out to the car they'd arrived in and sped off to pick up Miss Tearose. All was serene when they arrived at their destination. The roses of June dozed in the sun, passion red, virgin white and creamy yellow, a dazzling display in a beautiful, silent garden.

The house mute too, rose-windows watchful, cellar silent, and here, here, here. Miss Tearose sprawled in death with a single rose clutched in her hand. Puzzled, O'Connor turned to Sullivan.

"You know all the answers," he said. "Tell me, what happened to Miss Tearose?"

"The obvious, I'd say," Sullivan answered. "She did herself in."

"Is that a guess, or—"

"She knew the jig was up. You see, when she brought me that drink yesterday, she came back expecting to find me dead. But she didn't find me at all, of course. I'd left with the poisoned rosoli. So she knew what she'd probably half suspected all along, that things were closing in and that she'd finally trapped herself. Thus a bit of poison, say in a glass of rosoli."

"I'm quite sure the autopsy will show that death occurred as the result of poison, namely, roseaker, arsenic and mercury sublimate."

"I'm sure you're right," O'Connor growled and headed for the cellar steps and sunlight.

Sullivan and Kelly followed him and there in the garden, fed by the ghosts of four dead men, were the roses, pink, white, yellow and, dominating all, the savage red of the climber, flaming in the sun.

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THE LONG KNIVES WAIT

A Tale of a Man Who Mocked at Death-

by BILL PRONZINI



I AWOKE IN a sea of white. I tried to sit up. Pain flashed across my chest. Hands, strong yet gentle, pushed me back. I smelled antiseptic.

"Lie still," a voice said. "Do not try to move."

I felt drained. My eyes were heavy and would not stay open. I heard voices, but I could not understand the words. Perspiration soaked my body.

Something very cool touched my left arm. The odor of alcohol. Stinging prick of a needle. The voices began to dim almost immediately, and soon there was only silence.

When I opened my eyes again, my mouth was very dry. Hangover, I thought at first. But no, the dryness was somehow different. I started to roll over; my body would

not bend. Bandages. I was wrapped in them. I lay still again, looking at the ceiling. It was a gleaming white.

I moved my eyes around the room. White table, white walls. Two white chairs against one wall, and in one of them a young Malayan girl in a starched white uniform.

Nurse. I knew that immediately. But what was a nurse doing in my crib? No, this was not . . . All white. *Rumah sakit*. Hospital. Why am I in a hospital? Why am I wrapped in bandages? I could not seem to focus my mind. I felt drugged.

The nurse was reading a magazine. I opened my mouth to call to her, but I could not make any sound. Panic. I tried to lift myself again, and there was a tearing sen-

*Death comes easy in the China Seas.
For me it would be soon. I had de-
fied a vice lord. He would remember.*



sation under the bandages. I cried out, and red spots appeared in back of my eyes.

Dimly, I saw the nurse drop the magazine and come running to my bed. She put her hands gently on my shoulders and pushed me still.

"Please," she said in Malay. "I will get the *doktor*."

She was gone then, and I lay there and looked at the white ceiling. My head began to clear, slowly.

I became aware of the pain in my chest.

It was somewhat like a tooth abscess, only magnified, throbbing with each breath, reaching a crescendo and then diminishing, and then rising again with the pounding of my heart. I bit my lip, and tears squeezed from my eyes.

I raised my hand and wiped away the wetness. I saw the doctor then, standing over my bed. He put one hand on my chin to hold my head steady, passing the other hand back and forth in front of my eyes.

"How many fingers am I holding up?" he said. His English was very good. Oxford British. He was young and Malayan, like the nurse.

"Two," I said.

He nodded. "How do you feel?"

"Weak."

"That is understandable."

"There's pain in my chest."

"Yes."

"What happened?"

"You do not know?"

"No," I said.

"You were shot."

I stared at him. "Shot?"

"One bullet," the doctor said. "In the chest cavity. Inches either way . . ." He shrugged.

"How long have I been here?"

"Four days."

"Four days?"

"You were in a coma until last night."

I squeezed my eyes shut. I began to remember then.

It was raining.

I was walking in the rain. Going —where? To my crib? Yes, to my crib in Punyang Alley, walking in the rain. Chinatown. I had come from a bar in a Chinatown, nameless, a bar with yellow, hostile faces and fat, pink ladies painted obscenely on the gray walls.

There was an alley. I could see it through the rain, and I leaned against one of the supporting pillars of the Five Foot Ways there. Burning red Joss sticks recessed into the pillars were like hellish, glowing eyes in the darkness.

A voice called my name. I turned, looking into the alley, but I could see nothing through the wall of night. The voice called my name again, and the single word floated, disembodied, on the wind-swept rain.

"Who is it?" I said. "Who's there?"

Silence, and the falling rain. I went to the mouth of the alley, peering into the shrouded black.

The night exploded in a searing ball of yellowish light and a sound

like the maddening bawl of thunder erupted from the very center of the light, and I went to my knees on the wet cobblestones of the alley floor, sprawling forward onto my face, and I lay there with my cheek pressed against the cold, wet stones, feeling the chill of the rain on my neck and a hot, numbing warmth spreading through my chest like thick, boiling syrup.

Then the night closed in and there was nothing more.

I opened my eyes again. The nurse had a thermometer. She took my temperature. The doctor looked at it. "Do you have much pain?"

"Like a toothache," I said.

"Is it sharp?"

"No."

"Throbbing?"

"Yes."

"Hm," he said. "I should think you are out of danger now."

"Can I have some water?"

He poured me a glass of water from a plastic pitcher on the night-stand. I drank it. He said, "Do you feel well enough to have a visitor?"

I looked at him. "Visitor?"

"There is a man waiting to see you. He has been waiting for some time, now."

"What man?"

"From the *polis*."

"All right," I said.

The doctor left the room with the young nurse at his heels. After a moment a man came inside. He was small, bald near the crown of his head. English, I guessed. Trans-

planted. He wore a heavy raincoat over a neat brown suit. He held his hat in his hands. There was beaded water across the brim.

The man smiled.

"How are you feeling?" he asked.

It was a rhetorical question. I closed my eyes.

"May I sit down?" he said.

"Help yourself."

I heard him drag one of the white metal chairs near the bed and sit heavily.

"My name is Christian," he said. "I'm with the Singapore police."

I opened my eyes and looked at him,

He said, "Can you tell me what happened?"

"I don't know," I said. "I was drunk."

He cleared his throat. "Do you recollect anything at all?"

"A little," I said. I told him what I could remember.

"Did you see the person who shot you?"

"No."

"Do you have any idea who it might have been?"

"No."

"None?"

My grin was tight. "I've made enemies in my life."

"Enemies who would attempt to murder you?"

"I've been in the South China Seas a long time," I said. "I've done a lot of things and I've been a lot of places. Some of the people I've come in contact with aren't

exactly what you'd call the white-tie-and-tails set."

"We are aware of your, ah, reputation," Christian said.

"Then that answers your question."

He took a white linen handkerchief from his pocket and rubbed a wet spot on his hat. "Perhaps this attempt on your life is connected with your . . . recent activities."

"What does that mean?"

"You have been associating with members of the Pa'Cheng. Is this not correct?"

"No," I said.

"You do not know a man—an art dealer, as he claims—named Wong Sot?"

"No."

"You do know what the Pa'Cheng is?"

"It's a secret society," I said.

"Yes," Christian said. "A secret society comprised of gangsters and cut-throats who traffic in every illegal enterprise in Singapore."

"I've heard that said."

"Perhaps you somehow fell into their disfavor."

"I told you," I said. "I don't know anything about the Pa'Cheng. I don't know this Wong Sot you mentioned."

"We could help if you would let us," he said.

"Help to do what?" I said. "Look, why don't you just leave me alone? Can't you see I don't want anything from you?"

"If the Pa'Cheng has made one

attempt on your life, you may be assured it will not be the last," Christian said. "If there is anything you know, we will offer you protection."

"Protection?"

"Yes."

"I said, "If the Pa'Cheng were after me, all the protection in this city wouldn't be enough."

"That is exactly why we need your help," Christian said. "To break this hold of fear the Pa'Cheng has on the people of Singapore."

"Damn it," I said. "I told you. I can't help you, and you can't help me. You're wasting your time."

"Perhaps you do not realize—"

"Look, mister," I said. "How straight do I have to give to you? I don't care one fat damn about you, or the police, or whether the Pa'Cheng suddenly becomes ruler of the world. Now, suppose you just get the hell out of here."

There was a cord with a buzzer attached lying by my right hand. I put my finger on the buzzer and held it there. The Malayan nurse came in.

"What is it?"

"Get him out of here," I said.

"Perhaps you should leave," the nurse said to Christian. "He is very tired."

"Yes," Christian said. He looked at me. "I suggest you think about what I have said."

"Get out," I said.

"I will talk with you again,



Vinelli," he said. "Soon." The nurse let him out, and after a time came back with the British-speaking doctor. They gave me a hypodermic and shut off the lights and closed the door.

I lay on the bed, feeling the pain in my chest, and waited for the sedative to work. Why did you get involved? I thought. You're too old. You're an old man. Why did you want to get involved?

Well, it doesn't matter now. You're a dead man, Vinelli. Christian had been right. You've had the mark put on you, and when the Pa'Cheng marks you you're a dead man, any way you care to look at it.

It was really very ironic in a way. I couldn't have helped Christian if I'd wanted to. I didn't know anything. All the things I had known in my life, all the secrets I had carried, had made me many times a prime target for elimination. But this time, I did not know anything, nothing at all.

There was no reason that I could think of why the Pa'Cheng would want to kill me, except that I was a loose end. The Pa'Cheng does not like loose ends. I should not have gone to them at all. But you have to eat, and there was no money for food and no money for arac. And so I had gone to Wong Sot.

It had been very simple, the job I had done for them. Just a package. Just deliver a package . . .

IT HAD been a square package, about the size of a small jewel box, and wrapped in gold paper. A single strip of gold ribbon circled it, and fastened on top was a tiny gold bow. The package sat in the middle of Wong Sot's bare-topped desk.

I looked at it.

"I didn't know the Pa'Cheng was in the habit of giving presents," I said.

Wong Sot had a face like a prune. His skin was aged parchment, yellow and puckered, and looked the way skin will when it is soaked in water for any length of time. You could not tell the color

of his eyes. The puckered skin formed tiny caves, with slits for openings, and when he smiled, as he did now, the slits sealed the caves and the eyes disappeared completely. He folded his hands across the protruding girth of his middle.

He said, "There are many things you do not know about the Pa'Cheng, my friend."

I pointed toward the package. "What's inside?"

"You should not concern yourself with the contents," Wong Sot said. "Let us say it is merely a gift for an attractive young lady."

"Why don't you deliver it yourself?"

"A matter of expediency, you see," Wong Sot said.

"Which means?"

"Simply that it would be a most inopportune time for myself, or any of my associates, to carry such a gift as this."

"In other words," I said, "police search."

A sound like two sticks grating together came from Wong Sot's throat. I supposed it was a chuckle.

"Precisely," he said.

"If the police want what's in this package, you're taking a chance having it here."

"Yes, somewhat. But it has only recently arrived, and the danger is not great as long as we do not attempt to, shall we say, transport the package elsewhere. We need someone whom we can trust to

guard the package carefully until it can be delivered."

"Is that why you had me brought in the back way?"

"Yes."

I looked at him.

"How much?" I said.

"I see you are a man who does not waste words," Wong Sot said. "Very good. I like that." He opened a drawer in his desk and took out several bills. He laid them on the desk top. Three hundred Singapore dollars. One hundred, American.

I said, "Errand boys come high these days."

His smile widened. A damned yellow prune, I thought.

"The Pa'Cheng pays well for services rendered," he said.

I put the bills in my jacket. Wong Sot said, "You will deliver the package to a girl. Her name is Marlene."

"Where do I meet this girl?"

"The Pagoda."

Yes, I thought. It would be the Pagoda. "When?"

"This evening," Wong Sot said. "Nine o'clock. There will be a table reserved for you. The girl will identify herself by name, and ask to join you at your table. You will offer to buy her a drink, and she will accept, ordering a stengah. You are to keep the package in the right-hand side pocket of your jacket."

I waited. Wong Sot said nothing more. I said, "That's all?"

A slight nod. It was very hot in Wong Sot's office, and the sweet, nauseous odor of jasmine incense hung on the air. I stood and picked up the package from his desk. It was light. I put it into the right-hand side pocket of my jacket.

Then I turned my back on him and walked out. The back way.

The Pagoda is a dive.

It is a dive in the strictest sense of the word. Probably the worst in Singapore. It would have been closed long ago, if it were not for the fact that the Pa'Cheng owned and controlled it. It is in Sam Po Alley, or rather buried, like the rest of the city's sewers, below it. You reach it by way of a wooden door on the alley. A huge Chinese, dressed in the garb of Genghis Khan, replete with gleaming scimitar, stands guard there, and if you are not known or do not have one of the small cards given to regular customers as a pass, you do not get in.

When you pass through the second door, there are long, steep steps that lead down into the club proper. You cannot see anything from the head of the stairs. Flickering candles in green glass jars sit on each table, but they do not give off enough light to penetrate the thick, smoke-laden air that lies stagnate throughout the room.

At nine o'clock that night I sat at the table reserved for me, against one wall near the small stage at the upper end. A Chinese

waitress in a silver wrap-around skirt brought me a gin-and-quinine.

I sat nursing the drink. Five Singapore dollars for gin measured with an eye-dropper. But no one seems to mind. The Pagoda caters to the thrill-seeker, the rich tourist with a full wallet and very little morals, the influential Chinese *towkays*—businessmen—and British and American sailors. It is not surprising to find a ranking government official or two seated at a dark table in one of the corners. For a price, you can get anything at all in the Pagoda.

A door opened to my left, shedding pale light, near the bar on the left-hand wall. In there, the Casino. Roulette, fantan, shell-a-point, and all the wheels and all the games run by slick-haired Chinese with oiled smiles and polite words, and one finger on the trick buttons hidden beneath the tables.

I had been there fifteen minutes when the girl came. She came up silently, and stood by my table, her face shadowed, long, raven hair framing her head, falling across her shoulders.

She was tall and slender, dressed in a pale blue *cheongsam*. Long, tapering legs, long, slender fingers holding a matching blue handbag at her waist, finely jutting breasts. And that raven hair.

I felt the muscles in my stomach tighten, seeing her like that, and

long-buried thoughts flooded into my mind. Thoughts of another girl —a tall girl with long fingers and raven hair that fell across her shoulders. Thoughts of a quick smile and flashing gray eyes and a promise of twenty-five years ago, a promise that had died on two pieces of scented pink stationary two weeks before V-J Day.

The girl had moved a step closer to my table. I saw her face then. Eurasian, I thought. Thai, or Indo-Chinese bone structure, and an Oriental tilt to her eyes. Gothic nose, and lips full and painted a red that was too bright and too thick. French, perhaps. Her skin coloring was right.

But she was not beautiful. There was a hardness at her mouth, and lines across her forehead that even the heavy make-up she wore and the darkness of the room could not conceal. I guessed her age at thirty-five.

She said, "I am Marlene. May I join you?"

Yes, French. The accent was faint, but discernible. I said, "Be my guest."

She sat stiffly, erect. Her eyes touched my face briefly, and then moved away.

I said, "Drink?"

"Yes, a stengah, please."

One of the waitresses came by and I ordered the drink. I looked at Marlene:

"What do we do now?" I said.

She said nothing. When the

waitress brought the drink, and I had paid for it, she took three small sips, set the glass down, and got to her feet. She came around to my side of the table and leaned across me, and her lips touched mine. There was no warmth in the kiss, and I could smell the musky odor of the cheap perfume she wore. Her lips stayed on mine several seconds, and then she straightened, smiling at me, and moved off through the tight ring of tables.

I watched her leave. Very nice, I thought. To anyone watching it would have looked like a simple pick-up. A proposition, a kiss to seal it, and the girl leaving, to be followed by the man. I smiled. The package that had been in my coat pocket was gone, now. She was very good. I hadn't felt a thing.

I left then. I walked the streets, deeper into Chinatown. Overhead, thick, rolling clouds billowed. It would rain soon.

I went to the Seaman's Bar on South Bridge Road. I sat at a table in the rear and ordered a gin-and-quinine.

I drank some of the gin. The girl, Marlene, had pushed memories into my mind, and I could not seem to bury them again.

The bar seemed dark as a raven's wing.

THEY KEPT me in the hospital ten days.

The first four days were very bad. I ran a heavy fever. Chills,

Vomiting. I couldn't keep anything on my stomach except light broth, and that not for long.

They fed me penicillin and some other kind of drug, and on the fifth day the fever broke. After that there were no complications. The Malayan doctor said I had contracted a mild pneumonia.

I had two visitors in those ten days. Christian both times. The first time was a carbon copy of the original. The same questions and the same answers. The second time he came I refused to talk to him. He left, but I knew he would be back. I wondered how long he was going to keep on with it. He was a persistent bastard.

At the end of the second week the Malayan doctor came into my room and inspected the wound in my chest. There had been no pain for a long while now.

"Well," he said when he had finished. "Your wound has healed quite rapidly, and there have been no signs of recurrence of the pneumonia. Providing you agree to remain rather sedentary for awhile, I would say you are well enough to be leaving us."

I looked across at the single window on the far wall. A heavy rain whipped the chamadora palms in the hospital garden outside. They had been letting me walk out there to get my strength back.

I said, "How soon?"

"Any time you wish. Today, if you like."



"All right," I said. "Today."

At three o'clock that afternoon, I stood on the hospital steps, looking out at the gently falling rain. They had given me a heavy wool topcoat along with my personal belongings at the desk inside, and although it was not cold, I had the coat buttoned up to my throat.

I was thinking about what the nurse at the desk had said. Christian had called, asking my condition. And there had been another caller as well, who did not give his name; he had said he was a personal friend. She had told both of them I was being released this afternoon.

Christian had already set his wheels in motion. A little man in a gray rain hat sat in an English Ford parked at the curb to my right. He was watching me, and trying to look inconspicuous about it. A tail. Well, all right. Let him tag along.

I wondered how long it would take.

A yellow Singapore taxi turned the corner, and I hailed him. I had close to eighty dollars of Wong Sot's money left in my wallet.

I gave the cab driver the address of my crib in Punyang Alley.

But when we neared Singapore River I changed my mind, and told the driver to take me to Chinee's instead, just off Maltby Place. He let me off in front.

I stood looking at the sagging grey building through the rain. Someone had broken a pane from the window, and the green shade covering it was torn. Chinee had tacked a piece of cardboard over the opening, and it was soggy from the rain.

I crossed to the door. I saw the little man in the English Ford, parked a few doors down. I wondered where Christian had found him. He was as obvious as a ten-year-old kid with his first detective kit.

I stepped inside.

Dark and somewhat chilly, and nearly deserted. At the long bar against the left-hand wall were two Chinese coolies in faded blue denim drinking Tiger Beer. Sitting alone at a table against the rear wall was a fat little man with no fingers on his right hand. They called him the Dutchman.

Behind the bar Chinee stood filling the cooler with beer. He looked up when the door opened

and saw me. He stopped. I walked across the room. I took a seat at the upper end of the bar, away from the two Chinese.

Chinee walked down to where I sat. He is a giant. Almost seven feet tall, and there is not a single hair anywhere on his massive head. He leaned across the bar, and when he spoke his voice was very low.

"You should not be here," he said.

"That's some greeting for a sick friend."

He said nothing.

"Why didn't you come to the hospital?"

He wet his lips.

I smiled.

"So you're afraid of them," I said.

"Yes," Chinee said. "I am afraid of them. Any man who is not is a fool."

"They've never bothered you."

"They came here," Chinee said. "Two of Wong Sot's men. The day after you were shot."

"Here? Why?"

"They were looking for something," Chinee said. "Something they thought you had given me to keep for you."

"What kind of something?"

"I do not know."

"They didn't tell you?"

"No."

"What have you heard?"

"Nothing," he said. "Not a word."

"The hell," I said. "There's nothing that goes on in Singapore that you don't know about."

"Tongues have grown silent," Chinee said. He left it at that.

"All right," I said. "What did you tell the Pa'Cheng?"

"The truth," Chinee said. "That you gave me nothing."

"Did they believe you?"

"Perhaps so," Chinee said. "But they made threats. And the Pa'Cheng does not make idle threats. Whatever it is you have the Pa'Cheng wants very badly. It is not worth your life, and I will not allow it to be worth mine."

"Listen," I said. "I don't have a damn thing. That's the truth."

"What are you going to do?"

"What would you have me do?"

"I would have you leave Singapore, Vinelli," Chinee said.

"I'm not going anywhere."

"Then you *are* a fool."

"Maybe," I said. "But how far do you think I'd get? The Pa'Cheng wields strong power in the South China Seas."

"I have a friend who operates a tramp freighter," Chinee said. "He is leaving for the Phillipines tonight. I could arrange something."

"Forget it," I said. "I'm too old to start running now."

"What will you do? Sit and wait for the Pa'Cheng to come for you?"

"That's right," I said. "That's just what I'll do. I'm damn well

going to find out what this is all about."

"It does not matter whether you have what they are looking for or not," Chinee said. "If they believe you have it, and you cannot produce it, they will kill you anyway."

"I need a drink," I told him. "It's been a long time between drinks."

Wordlessly, Chinee poured a water glass half full of arrack. I drank it, feeling the hot, acrid taste in my throat. I coughed, and for a moment I did not think the arrack would stay down. A long time, I thought.

His face an Oriental mask, Chinee said, "You will leave now, Vinelli. I do not want the Pa'Cheng to find you here."

I shrugged. I took fifteen Singapore dollars from my wallet and laid the bills on the bar. "A bottle of arrack first."

He brought me the bottle. He did not touch the money. I stood and went to the door. The table at the far end of the room, where the man known as the Dutchman had been sitting, was empty now. I smiled a little. The rain brings out many things, I thought. Even the vultures.

I opened the door, and stepped out into the rain.

THEY WERE waiting in Hontou Alley.

When I left Chinee's, I walked west along Telok Ayer Street and

into Chinatown and my crib in Punyang Alley. I thought at first about taking another cab, but I decided the short three block walk in the rain wouldn't hurt me. It was not cold. The little man in the English Ford had abandoned his wheels, and was following me on foot now, about three-quarters of a block back.

The rain quickened somewhat as I walked, and the streets were almost empty this late in the afternoon. I stayed in close to the small shops lining the streets. The Five Foot Ways offered little protection, the rain slanting in at a heavy angle, and I knew I had made a mistake in walking.

I was drenched before I had gone two blocks.

When I came to Hontou Alley, I paused momentarily on the curb, pulling the collar on the overcoat higher around my neck. Then I stepped down off the curb, my head bent into the rain. I had taken three steps when I heard the roar of the car engine, accelerating rapidly, and the loud, grating clash of meshing gears.

I turned toward the sound, and through the rain I saw the looming shape of a small German sedan as it shot away from the curb part way down the block, tires spinning on the wet pavement, and the darkened headlights were twin eyes through the swirl of rain as I stood motionless on the street.

The car was almost on top of me

when I reacted—simple reflex, conditioned movements.

I threw myself backwards, twisting in the air, and the bumper of the sedan tugged at my pant leg as it slammed past. I hit the pavement on my left side, my face and shoulders scraping the rough concrete, and a rush of fire shot through my chest. The bottle of arrack was in my left hand, and it shattered as I landed. I rolled off the sharpness of the glass and into the rushing rain-wash in the gutter, my mouth gaping open, and a stream of putrid water poured into my throat and nose.

I gagged, rolling again, into a sitting position with my legs splayed out, facing the corner. The German sedan had skidded into a looping fishtail trying to take the turn onto Telok Street with too much speed, and as I looked I saw it slide sideways into an empty trishaw on the opposite side of the street, upending it, and then the car straightened, wobbling, tail-lights flashing in the rain as the driver pumped the brakes, and was gone, spewing sheets of spray from its tires.

I sat in the rushing water. A boy in a coolie hat ran up to me, shouting. I struggled to my feet. The boy began to babble in Cantonese. I could not understand what he was saying.

More people came running up, now, circling me in a tight ring. An Englishman in a bowler hat and

trenchcoat pushed his way through.

"I saw the whole thing," he said.
"Bloody ass, driving like that. You all right, fellow?"

I managed a nod. "I've got my car," the Englishman said. "You'd better let a doctor have a look at you."

I started to answer him, but then I saw the little man who had been following me come running up the street, and I knew that if I waited around for him there would be questions, and probably an interview with Christian at police headquarters, and I did not want any of that.

I pushed through the crowd of people, stumbling across the street. I heard the Englishman yell something, and then another shout that must have come from the little man, but I didn't stop. I ducked down the first alley I saw, running in the rain, and there was an agony of hot pain in my chest.

I ran to another alley, down there, and squeezed through an opening in a board fence. I thought my lungs would burst. Up ahead I saw a neon sign suspended above a tavern. The sign glowed a distorted wet crimson through the rain.

I stepped inside the tavern and went to the bar. I knew I had lost the little man now.

The man behind the bar, a short Chinese in a white coat, looked at me and his eyes grew wide and frightened.

"Arrack," I said, still gasping.
"Bring the bottle."

He brought it, and backed away from me, his eyes still wide. I saw myself in the bar mirror. There was a discolored bruise covering most of the right side of my face, and my hair was wet, plastered down across my forehead. The overcoat was torn in two places.

I thought, *they didn't waste any time. I've only been out of the hospital for one hour.* Quick and fast. No questions asked.

Damn pain in my chest. I stuck my hand under my shirt to see if the fall had pulled the wound open, but it seemed to be all right. I wondered if I were bleeding internally.

Another thought nagged at my brain.

No questions asked.

But why not? Chinee had said they thought I had something that belonged to them. There was the possibility that they had found whatever it was, but that did not seem likely, since Chinee had said there was complete silence. That had to mean it was something big, and the Pa'Cheng were enforcing tight security to keep word from leaking out. And if they had found this something they were after, then some word would have drifted on the grapevine.

All right. They still had not found it.

Then why try to run me down with a car?

To begin with, it wasn't the weapon of the Pa'Cheng. It was crude and amateurish; things that the Pa'Cheng are not. Then why? Why not pick me up, question me, if they thought I had what they were looking for? The Pa'Cheng has ways of breaking men to get the answers they want.

Why put a bullet in my chest in a dark alley?

Hell, yes, that didn't make any sense either. None of it did. Somebody was trying to kill me, all right, but now I wasn't so sure it was the Pa'Cheng at all. But who, then? and why? And what was it the Pa'Cheng thought I had?

A lot of questions there, and none of them had any answers.

And the only man I knew who did have some of the answers was Wong Sot.

I drank some of the arrack and put bills from my wallet on the bar. Outside, I could see a break in the darkness of the sky, and I knew the rain was over. The air had already begun to take on that hot, humid feel of the tropics.

I looked up and down the street for some sign of the little man, but he was gone. They would be waiting for me at my crib, I thought.

A boy in a covered trishaw pedaled past, and I hailed him. I had to take a chance of going back to my crib; I needed to change these wet clothes and I wanted the Walther automatic I kept in the bottom drawer of my dresser.

Maybe there was a little fight left in me after all. I was going to see Wong Sot.

I told the boy to take me to Bilou Street, one street over from Punyang Alley. He dropped me there, and I went to the narrow alley between it and Punyang Alley, to where the side door of the building that houses my crib is located. I checked the alley carefully, but I saw no one. If anyone were waiting for me, they were waiting out front.

The building in which I live is ancient and sagging. The facade is colorless, and the only ornamentation is laundry hung to dry from horizontal poles jutting below the glassless windows. Inside are twenty cribs, eight feet square each, and there is one toilet per floor. Most of the cribs are inhabited by Chinese peasant families, some with five and six children. At night, you can hear the hunger cries of the children and you sleep with the smell of hopelessness in your nostrils.

I opened the side door of the building with my key. Both it and the front door on Punyang Alley are kept locked at all times, and are made of heavy wood, reinforced with steel braces.

I shut the door behind me and stood for a moment, letting my eyes become accustomed to the darkness. The long hallway is evil-smelling and narrow, and at the upper end, near the front door, are

a flight of stairs. My crib is on the second floor, and I crossed to them. Here the darkness was complete.

I had one foot on the first step when they came out from beneath the stairs.

There were two of them. One was thin, almost emaciated, and his eyes bulged like a frog's. He resembled a cadaver. The other was short, with the left side of his face pulled down where a knife scar ran the length of his cheek.

They were a nice pair. The cadaver's name was Yip Se, and the other one was Wah Soo Sung. They were Wong Sot's personal bodyguards.

Wah Soo Sung came around behind me and took my arms in a vice grip. The cadaver held a white bone-handled knife engraved with the seal of the Pa'Cheng, and the tip of the blade was touching the soft flesh in the hollow of my throat. They worked it very fast, and very neatly. I didn't have time to blink.

Yip Se said, "Do not move. Stand very still."

"I'm not moving," I said.

"Wong Sot wishes words with you."

"I want a few words with him myself."

The short one let go of my arms. Yip Se took the knife away from my throat, watching my eyes to see if I would make any kind of move for it. I stood motionless.

Satisfied, Yip Se let the knife disappear into his clothes. He made a motion. We went out the way I had just come in, down the alley to Bilou Street. A car waited at the curb.

Now maybe I was going to find out what it was all about.

The sign on the rear door of the small, dusty shop on Barnaby Place read: *Wong Sot, Art Objects, Deliveries Only*. Chinese characters below it said the same. Yip Se opened the door with a key, and we stepped into a small storage room lit only by a bluish light suspended from the ceiling on a long cord.

We passed boxes of cheap carved figurines, worthless Chinese water color prints stacked in long rows on the floor, sculptured statuse on alabaster pedestals. Through a door then, into a hallway.

At the end was Wong Sot's private office. It was the same way I had come in before.

Yip Se rapped twice on the door. Inside, Wong Sot's voice said, "Yup lei." We went in.

Wong Sot sat behind his desk. He had been looking out at a Chinese funeral procession with its paper-sculptured hearses and umbrella-carrying pallbearers, passing in the rear alley. But when the door opened he swiveled to face the room. The two Chinese grabbed my arms and shoved me up to the desk.

Wong Sot stared at me through the slits that hid his eyes.

"I will not waste unnecessary words, Vinelli," he said. His voice dripped acid. "You would be wise to do the same by not lying to me. Where is the package?"

I stared at him. "What package?"

"I warn you," he said. "Do not try my patience. I have waited three weeks for that package and I do not intend to wait any longer."

"I don't know what you're talking about," I said.

"You are indeed a fool," Wong Sot said. "Do you think the Pa'Cheng can be trifled with?"

"I don't know what the hell it is you think I've got, but I'm telling you I don't have it."

"I will not tolerate this!"

"Now listen," I said, "I don't like being a target, and I like it less when I don't know why. Now here I am. But before you finish it, I'm damn well going to know the reason."

Wong Sot was staring at me. It was very quiet. A fly buzzed near the ceiling, a fat, blue fly, and that was the only sound.

Wong Sot said finally, "You think the Pa'Cheng attempted to kill you?"

"What else am I supposed to think?"

"Ridiculous," Wong Sot said. "Why would we order you killed?"

"If it wasn't you, then who was it?"

"I do not know," Wong Sot said. "When the first attempt was made, we endeavored to find out. It remains a mystery. We were as interested as you in your remaining alive. If you were dead, we cannot recover the package."

"I'm going to tell you one more time," I said. "*I don't know anything about any package!*"

But as I said that I knew what package he was talking about. It hit me just like that. The package I had delivered to the Pagoda. What the hell?

Wong Sot said, "Well, Vinelli?"

"I haven't got that damn package," I said. "I delivered it to the Pagoda, just the way I was told."

"You did not deliver it."

"I damn well did deliver it," I said. "I took it to the Pagoda and the girl lifted it from my pocket. Isn't that the way it was supposed to happen?"

"That is the way," Wong Sot said. "Only the package Marlene received from you contained nothing but confetti."

"Confetti. It was the same package you gave me."

"Impossible," Wong Sot said. "I myself wrapped that package only a short time before you arrived. Now I do not intend to play this cat and mouse any longer. Where is the package?"

"I told you, I delivered it to the Pagoda."

"The Pa'Cheng has methods of extracting the truth," Wong Sot,

said slowly. "You would not enjoy them, Vinelli."

"Listen," I said, "who was the package supposed to end up with?"

"A certain party in Johore Bahru."

"Is this party the one who told you the package contained confetti?"

"No."

"Who was it, then?"

"Marlene."

"The girl who took it from me?"

"Yes."

"How did she know?"

"She was present when it was opened."

"All right, then," I said. "She's the one you want, not me. She's got the real package."

"Marlene is a trusted member of the Pa'Cheng."

"I don't care what she is."

"She would not betray us."

"No?" I said. "What does the package contain?"

"You know as well as I do what the package contains."

"How many times do I have to tell you, Wong Sot?" I said. "What was in that package?"

He was silent for a moment, watching me. Then, "Cocaine, Vinelli. The package contains one quarter of a million dollars in pure cocaine."

I took a breath. Narcotics. I didn't like that. I didn't like that at all. I said, "Did the girl know beforehand?"

"Of course."

"A quarter of a million dollars is enough to make anyone sell out his loyalties."

"I do not believe it."

"Which is exactly what she must have counted on," I said.

"What do you mean?"

It had all fallen into place now. I had been set up, very nicely, neatly, set up.

I said to Wong Sot, "Don't you see the way it is? The girl kept the original package and substituted the dummy herself. When the dummy was opened, she would claim the package I had delivered to her was the same one. She's a trusted member of the Pa'Cheng, as you said; there would be no reason for you to doubt her word.

"But she couldn't leave it there. If you got to me, and I could convince you I was telling the truth, she knew what would happen to her. So in order to insure her story, I had to be killed. When my body was found, she figured you wouldn't look any further for the cocaine, that maybe you would think I had been killed by somebody else who wanted it and knew I had it. It would buy her the time she needed to get out of Singapore with the real package."

"Idiot's tale," Wong Sot said.

"Is it?" I said. "Or don't you want to admit you've been taken?"

"How could Marlene have done all these things?"

"She had help," I said. "There's

no doubt about that. It was a man's voice I heard that night in the alley, and there was a man driving the car that tried to run me down today. A boy friend, probably."

"If what you say were true," Wong Sot said, "then why did Marlene not leave Singapore immediately, even after the first attempt on your life failed?"

"She must have been scared," I said. "She knew you were tearing Singapore apart, looking for the package. If she suddenly disappeared, she knew you would put two and two together and come up with her. But with me dead, there was no reason why, after awhile, she couldn't quietly go off somewhere without your suspecting she had the real package all along. So she had to wait until I was released from the hospital and make another try at eliminating me. Which explains the car that tried to run me down this afternoon."

Wong Sot sucked at the ring finger of his right hand. Then he pulled the phone on his desk to him. He dialled a number. He waited several minutes, his fat fingers drumming on the desk top. Abruptly he cradled the receiver. Frowning, he said, "There is no answer."

He motioned with his hand, and Yip Se stepped forward. Wong Sot said something in fleet Chinese, and the cadaver nodded and left the room.

Wong Sot looked at me. "I have

sent Yip Se to bring Marlene here. I still do not believe what you say, but I want that package very badly. I cannot allow any possibility to be overlooked."

"Look," I said, "you must have had me checked out pretty thoroughly before you brought me into this. You must have found that I could be trusted, or you wouldn't have let me carry the package."

"That has bothered me somewhat," Wong Sot said. "I am an excellent judge of men, and I am seldom wrong. But as you yourself said, a quarter of a million dollars in pure cocaine is enough to make anyone forsake his loyalties or his pattern of trust."

"All right," I said. "But there's another thing. If I had the package, do you think I would have been hanging around for your men to pick me up? I would have tried to get out of Singapore as soon as I left the hospital."

"Unless you thought you could fool me by concocting a tale such as this one."

"I've been around a long time, Wong Sot," I said. "I'm not stupid enough to think I could fool the Pa'Cheng."

I could see that my words were beginning to have an effect on Wong Sot. His prune face was contorted in deep thought. He said, "Sit down, Vinelli. There, against the wall. We will wait for Marlene."

We waited almost two hours. I

sat in the quiet of Wong Sot's office, and through the window behind his desk I watched it grow dark. The sky had cleared completely now, and there was the mugginess of gathering heat in the air. My clothes stuck to my skin, and they still held the stench of the gutter rain water. The pain in my chest had subsided into a muted throbbing.

Wong Sot did not speak while we waited. He sat looking out of the window at the darkened alley.

At nine-ten Yip Se returned.

He was alone.

He spoke to Wong Sot. I watched Wong Sot's lips tighten, and the slits where his eyes hid were fine lines, like a slash made on a portrait with a tiny brush. When Yip Se had finished, Wong Sot looked to me.

"She is gone," he said. "Yip Se went to her home, and found it deserted. A neighbor said she told him she was planning to visit relatives in Penang. Yip Se searched the inside of her home. Her clothes and belongings are gone, items which would not be taken on a short visit to relatives."

"She must have got scared," I said. "That miss with the car this afternoon probably scared them plenty."

"I must find her," Wong Sot said. "If she has already left Singapore with the package, there are a hundred Asian markets where it could be disposed of."

I said, "I don't think she's left Singapore. Not just yet, anyway."

I could feel the intensity of his hidden eyes on me. "No?"

"They've still got to make another attempt at me," I said. "With me dead, they would have time to sell the cocaine and get as far away from Singapore as possible before you guessed the truth. Otherwise, they wouldn't have any time at all; and they might never get out of Singapore."

"Perhaps you are right," Wong Sot said.

"You should be able to find them," I said. "Singapore isn't that big."

"I do not think that is likely. My people are most adept, but she had undoubtedly hidden herself well. We would find Marlene eventually, but that would, perhaps, be too late to recover the package." He wet his parchment lips. "There is, however, one other way we can locate her."

"Which is?"

"You, Vinelli."

I stared at him. You prune-faced bastard, I thought. "So this is the way it is. You send me out to walk the streets, and when they make another attempt you grab them."

"Quite right," Wong Sot said, smiling.

"Quite wrong," I said. "You can find yourself another boy."

Wong Sot shrugged. "It is your choice, of course. However, if you

do not do as I say, I will kill you."

"What difference does it make if they kill me or you do? I'm just as dead, either way."

"Perhaps not. Yip Se and Wah Soo Sung are quite capable."

"And suppose they're not capable enough?"

He shrugged. "I am afraid you are expendable, Vinelli. My only concern in this matter is recovering the package, and seeing that Marlene is dealt with."

Like a lamb, I thought. Just like a lamb tied to a stake, and the lions, in the Lion City, were on all sides. But I really didn't have a choice. What else was there for me to do? Either way, this was going to be the end of it.

"All right," I said to Song Sot. "We'll do it your way."

"You are being wise."

I stood looking at him, at the flat Oriental smile and the yellow prune face, and then I turned and walked through the door.

This time I went out the front way.

CHINATOWN after dark is a paradox.

It is a swarming concourse of glaring neon lights. It is a milling throng of people, Chinese and Caucasians, Easterners, Westerners, Europeans. It is bedlam, voices raised into a jumbled cacophony, like a recorded tape played two speeds too fast, the cries of night hawkers chanting their wares in

the market places, staccato explosions of firecrackers, the penetrating throb of music from itinerant Chinese opera companies performing *wayangs* along the sidewalks. It is color and gaiety, laughter and merriment.

But it is also blackness, deep impenetrable blackness, and in its alleys and basements, behind closed, locked doors, along foul-smelling hallways, there is no laughter and no gaiety. In the bowels of Chinatown, the gray balustraded buildings close over the streets like the walls of a prison. This Chinatown is phlegmatic, unfeeling, and at night, the air seems somehow more chill, somehow clammy, like the touch of long dead flesh.

I walked through the crowded bazaars and open market stalls along Maxwell and Neil Roads. I walked from the Thian Hock Keng Chinese Temple to the Hong Lim Green, along crowded palm-lined streets, brightly lighted, the smell of frangapani and gardenias rich and heady after the heavy rain.

And I walked into the belly—Sago Lane, The Alley of the Cobra, Singsep Place, and where I live, Punyang Alley. The click of my shoes on the pavement rang unnaturally loud in the stillness. I passed dark and shuttered shops, and along deserted street. And here the smell was that of garbage and unwashed bodies, perfumed incense and garlic, cooked opium

and cooked rice, mixing in a pot-pourri of foul air that hung like a pall above the streets.

I walked the paradox for over an hour.

Nothing.

I left Chinatown then, and walked to Collyer Quay. My legs felt rubbery, and the pain still throbbed in my chest, and I knew I could not go on much longer. But I walked.

I walked across the Cavanaugh Bridge that spans Singapore River, past the Government Building and the legislative Assembly Hall, and along the sea wall of the River.

I prowled amongst the shadows of the storage warehouses between South Bridge and New Bridge Roads, and then northeast in the direction of Clemenceau Avenue, staring out at the silent forms of the *prahus* and the junks and the *twakows*.

Still nothing.

I began to wonder if maybe I had been wrong. Maybe they had already left Singapore. It was possible they had seen Wong Sot's men take me from my crib in Punyang Alley, and had decided to run without bothering with me. If they were still in Singapore, something should have happened by now. They would have been looking for me, and I had given them plenty of opportunity in the last hour and half.

When I reached Clemenceau Avenue I turned left, crossing the



Singapore River again. I walked west, entering Kentong Bahru Road. I went two blocks, towards Outram Road now and another swing back through Chinatown. A tiny creek, some ten feet below the level of the street, ran parallel to the road. It was bordered with thick ferns and white *syringa* bushes, and several mangosteen trees, laden heavy with fruit, grew on the opposite side.

I walked on the soft grass at the top of the bank. I stopped to light a cigarette, cupping my hands around the match. As I did, headlights made a wide swing onto Kentong Bahru Road behind me, sweeping light. The car rolled past,

and then slowed, and I heard the screech of brakes as the car skidded to a halt a hundred feet up the road.

It was the German sedan.

He might have spotted me in town and waited for me to leave the relative safety of the streets before he made his play. Or he might have just been combing the city, and had somehow missed me. I didn't have time to ponder it, now.

I heard the grinding of gears as he threw the sedan in reverse, and then the whine of the engine. The sedan shot backwards, towards me, and I went off the side of the road, sliding down the grassy bank.

I lost my footing and tumbled down, pain a screaming agony in my chest, rolling through wet ferns and spongy leaf mold. I banged into a *katumpagan*—Artillery Plant—and the stamens burst with small explosions that sounded almost like infantry fire, and cloud of pollen dust, like puffs of smoke, bit into my nose and eyes.

Tires screamed on the pavement above me, and I heard the car door thrown open. I clawed my feet under me and scrambled through the creek to the cover of the mangosteen trees on the other side.

I looked up at the road, and I saw him then, one man, silhouetted against the dark sky behind him, and in his hand I could see the outline of a gun. He stood still for a moment, peering into the darkness,

and then he started down the bank.

Where the hell were those Chinese bodyguards? But as I thought that, the man, halfway down the bank, whirled and went to his knees, and I heard the slap of feet on the pavement. I saw them then, coming around the front of the sedan angled across the road, the short one in the lead.

The man's first shot shattered the stillness of the night, and I saw Wah Soo Sung stop in mid-stride, both hands flying to his face, and then he staggered and fell sprawling to the side of the road. The man pumped two more shots, and I heard one thump into metal somewhere on the sedan, and Yip Se reeled, slowing, but held onto his balance, his teeth bared white in the darkness, and went off the side of the road in a sideways leap.

His feet dug into the soft ground of the bank and he crashed into the man before he could get off another shot, and they rolled, a tangled jumble of arms and legs, crashing as I had done through the ferns and bushes, and when they hit the creekbed they rolled apart.

There was no sound then. You could not even hear the rustle of leaves, and the cicadas and crickets were still. I came out from behind the mangosteens. Yip Se lay on his stomach, arms spread-eagled over his head, and he did not move. The man who had tried to kill me lay on his back in the stream of water in the creek bed,

and in his chest; buried below the breastbone, was Yip Se's bone-handled knife.

I went to him and knelt down. Dead. He had dark hair and a soft-lipped petulant boy's mouth. I searched his clothes, but I did not expect to find anything. He had been alone, and that meant the girl was waiting for him somewhere. And with the girl would be the real package. But where?

I went through the stuff in his pockets. A wad of bills—Singapore and several French francs. A comb. Matches. A pack of cigarettes. In his inside coat pocket, a wallet that held a French visa, issued to a Claude Durais. His face stared back at me from the photo.

And in his side coat pocket I found a key.

A single brass key, attached by a length of bead chain to an irregular piece of ironwood. Embazoned in gold letters on the ironwood was *Tampines Court*, and below that the numerals 10.

I stood, holding the key in my hand. Tampines Court. A string of bungalows off Tampines Road, near the Pasir Ris Beach Resort on the Northern end of the island. And I knew that was where the girl had to be. They must have been planning to go across the strait at Ponggol Point to Johore.

I put the key in my pocket and started up the side of the bank. Metal glinted in the grass. I bent and saw that it was the gun the

Frenchman had had. A Beretta. I put it into my jacket.

When I reached the road, there was sweat soaking my entire body. I touched my forehead, and felt it fiery hot. Fever. Maybe the pneumonia had come back. My knees were weak, and the pain in my chest forced me to breathe in short gulps of air. I needed sleep and I needed a drink and maybe I needed a prayer. But there was something else, first.

I looked to see if the gunfire had attracted anyone. No one in sight. I went to the German sedan. The keys still dangled from the ignition. I got inside and put in the clutch and turned it over. Misfire. Then it caught and held. I put it in gear and got out of there.

It took me twenty minutes to drive the fourteen miles to Tampines Road.

I wondered what the hell I was doing. I was done with it, now. All I had to do was call Wong Sot and tell him where the girl was, where the package of cocaine was, and I would be a free man. The Frenchman was dead. Wong Sot would do nothing to me, I knew, if he recovered the package. Then why? I thought. Why do you keep on with it? I did not have an answer.

Tampines Court was near Upper Changi Road, two miles from Changi Point and perhaps six from Ponggol Point. It was a flat string of fifteen bungalows, each with a private walk and garden.

Behind the bungalows was a long stretch of clean white beach, and to the left were *kampongs*—stilt houses—where the Malay fishermen lived. To the right was marshland. A small road, which I had just come down, connected Tampines Road with the coast and the *kampongs*, and it was along this that the court was located.

I parked the sedan at the side of the road. I found the private drive for Bungalow Ten, keeping in the shadows of the coconut palms that grew beside it. A light shown through a window in front of the bungalow. The bamboo blinds were drawn. I stepped across the grass and through a hibiscus garden to the side of the window. I looked in through one of the chinks in the blind.

She was sitting in a thatched bamboo chair. She wore a green *samfu*—Chinese pajamas with short sleeves and a high collar—and she was very nervous. As I watched she lit a cigarette, and then stamped it out without drawing on it. She stood, and began to pace the room, looking at the clock on the wall opposite the window. It was almost midnight.

She continued to pace the floor. In the open doorway to the bedroom I could see four large suitcases, packed and ready to go. They were planning to leave tonight, all right.

I moved away from the window and went up onto the porch, walk-

ing softly. I tried the door. Locked. I took the key from my pocket and fitted it carefully into the slot. It wouldn't turn. She had a key in the lock inside.

I rapped on the door. Inside, her bare feet padded on the floor. "Claude?"

I muffled my voice in the collar of my jacket. "Yes."

The key in the lock turned, and she pulled the door open. "Did you—?"

The words froze on her mouth. The color drained from her face, her eyes going wide, a speckled green and brown. She tried to push the door closed again.

I blocked it with my body and shouldered it wide, the wood banging off the inside wall. I put one hand on her chest and shoved her away from me, into the center of the room, and then stepped inside and caught the door and slammed it shut again.

She stood for a moment, staring at me, I knew what I must look like. But then she came at me, hands raise like claws. She raked my right arm as I brought my hands up to protect my face, and I caught both her wrists and held them with one hand and slapped her hard. I dragged her to the bamboo chair and threw her into it.

"Your boy friend is dead, Marlene," I said. "He's lying in a creek bed on Kentong Bahru Road with a knife in his chest."

I watched the shock register on

her face, and then hot, blind rage.

"You killed him!" she screamed at me. "You killed him!"

She came out of the chair like a damned cat and I slapped her again, twice this time, and she sank back.

"I didn't kill him," I said. "The Pa'Cheng killed him."

The fight went out of her then. Her face began to stretch, like pliable dough, and she seemed suddenly very old, very tired. She began to cry.

I said, "It's all over, Marlene."

She shook her head from side to side. It wobbled loosely like a puppet's.

"I loved him," she said. Her voice was flat and dead. "I loved him."

"Sure," I said. "And he talked you into the whole thing."

"No. It was my idea. I knew about the cocaine. I wanted to go away with him, but we had no money. It was my idea."

I felt no anger. But I was tired, very, very tired. "Where is the package, Marlene?"

Her eyes touched my face. "What are you going to do with me?"

"Where's the package?" I said again.

"You're going to kill me," she said. "If I give you the package, you're going to kill me."

"No," I said. "I'm not going to kill you."

She stared straight ahead.

"What does it matter? The Pa'Cheng will see that I am dead."

"Give me the package," I said, "and you can walk out of here. You can get on the boat or whatever. I don't care what you do. I just want the package."

She looked at me again. "You would let me go? Even after—"

"That's right," I said. "Even after you tried to kill me."

"The Pa'Cheng will find me. Wherever I go, they will find me."

"You made your own bed," I said. "I'm letting you walk out of here. That's all I can do."

"All right," she said. "You—"

She stopped. I saw the green-and-brown eyes widen, come alive with fear, and at first I could not understand the fear. But then I saw that she was looking past me, to the door, and a scream bubbled from her throat, and I spun around, looking there.

He stood framed in the doorway, hanging onto the jamb with one hand. I hadn't heard him open the door. The front of his shirt was bloodied. In his right hand he held the bone-handled knife with the Pa'Cheng seal, the same knife he had used to kill Claude Durais on Kentong Bahru Road.

Yip Se. The cadaver.

His bulging eyes were huge and white, seeming to protrude on invisible wires from the sockets, and his yellow face had the consistence of wax, the way a corpse's face will look after embalming. His

mouth was twisted, pulled down away from his teeth, and a thin trickle of blood drooled from one corner.

I saw all this in the time it took me to recognize him, and then claw the Beretta from inside my jacket. But as I brought the gun out, I saw him reverse the knife in his hand and a dart of steel shot past me as he flicked his arm. The girl's scream was cut off in mid-pitch, and I saw her gasp and then become quiet.

I would have shot him then. But as soon as the knife left his hand, Yip Se began to crumble, his hands clawing at the door jamb, and he fell in a heap on the floor.

I turned and went to Marlene. The bone-handled knife protruded from her chest, just above her left breast. She had died instantly, like Durais, both of them in the same way, with the same knife.

I stood looking down at her. The justice of the Pa'Cheng is swift, I thought. I felt nothing, except the faint sadness a man feels when a life ends, when he has seen it end.

I went to where Yip Se lay. He was dead this time, no mistake. He must have been unconscious in the creekbed. I had not bothered to check him. I wondered how he had found us. There must have been something in the Frenchman's pockets that I had missed—the matchbook, maybe; I hadn't looked at it.

I wondered too, if he had had

time to call Wong Sot. I decided that he hadn't. He had gotten here too soon after I did. He must have flagged down a car, or stolen one, and come straight to Tampines Court. That meant I still had some time left.

I moved Yip Se's body inside the room, and shut the door again. I used my handkerchief to wipe the knob on the both sides; if I got out of this thing with Wong Sot I didn't want Chrisitan or some other member of the *polis* sticking me with a murder rap.

Then I went looking for the cocaine.

It took me fifteen minutes to find it.

It was in two narrow, sealed cellophane bags, sewn into the lining of a lightweight cotton coat packed into one of the large suitcases I had seen from the window.

I stood with the bags held in my hands. All I had to do now was take them back to Wong Sot and that would be the end of it. The end of it? Or just the beginning? I looked at the sugary white powder, one quarter of a million dollars worth of living hell, and I thought, once this is cut and processed, how many injections are here? How many rides on the high white horse? How many momentary escapes from one reality into one even more terrible?

I did not know the answer. I knew only, now, the reason I had come here, the reason I had not

called Wong Sot, and I knew the answer to the question I had asked myself driving out here.

I could not be a party to the parasitic feeding on human weakness that was the sale and distribution of narcotics. A man must draw the limit to what he will do, the depths to which he will sink, and of all the things I had done in my life, it was at narcotics that I had drawn my limit. I could not go beyond that now, not even if it meant my life.

I went into the bathroom and tore the bags of cocaine open and emptied them into the toilet bowl.

I jammed down the trip lever and watched the water pour into the bowl, watched the powder foaming, bubbling like a giant seltzer. And when the water was clean again, I turned and went out through the living room, past the bodies of Marlene and Yip Se, and out into the muggish night. The smell of the hibiscus in the cottage garden was sweet, and very fresh.

I did not look back.

I drove the German sedan back into Singapore, and parked it on a deserted side street near the river. Then I walked back two blocks to the only sanctuary I knew. Chinee's.

They were closing now. Chinee was not there. I bribed the barman to let me inside, and bought a bottle of arrack. I sat alone at a booth through the beaded entranceway at the upper end of the bar, the



only light a candle burning on the table.

The arrack did nothing to ease the fire that raged in my chest, nor to calm the pounding in my head, nor to stop the flow of sweat that drenched my body. I knew I should go to the hospital. But not tonight. Tomorrow, if I was able. Tomorrow I would go.

I thought about Wong Sot.

I wondered how long it would take him to find me. And what he would do when he did. I would tell him I had not found the package of cocaine. I would tell him perhaps Marlene and Durais had somehow hidden it, or gotten it out of Singapore. Perhaps he would believe me and perhaps he would not. Perhaps he would seek vengeance on me for the death of Yip Se and Wah Soo Sung. Or perhaps he would realize that I had nothing to do with the circumstances leading up to them, that I had been caught in the middle of all of it.

The workings of a mind like

Wong Sot's were impossible to prejudge.

I would know either way by morning.

Now, there was only tonight.

The bottle was half-empty when Chinee came in. He stood looking down at me. His yellow face was expressionless. I said, "Surprised?"

"No," he said.

"When I left here this afternoon, I was a dead man. You said so yourself, my friend."

"Perhaps you still are," Chinee said. "The *polis* found Wong Sot's bodyguard, Wah Soo Sung, and another man dead on Kentong Bahru Road."

"Too bad," I said.

"Did you have anything to do with it?"

"No," I said.

"You can still leave Singapore tonight," he said. "It is not too late."

"I've made it this long," I said. I smiled. "Maybe the scheduled execution of Vinelli has been canceled."

"Not canceled," Chinee said. "Merely postponed." And he turned and left me alone.

I poured another drink. My hands had begun to shake uncon-

trollably, and most of the liquid spilled on the table.

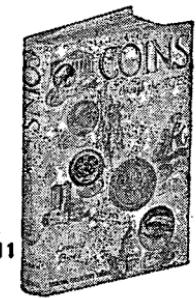
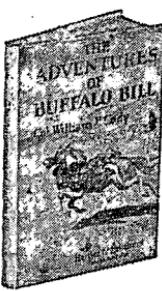
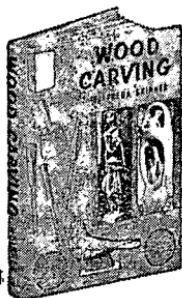
Merely postponed. Yes, I thought. Postponed until tomorrow, and the executioner the Pa'-Cheng, or postponed for a week, or a month, or a year, and the executioner some faceless, nameless enemy in the night.

I thought about the death I had seen tonight, and I thought about all the death I had seen in my life, and about the men I had been forced to kill, and about the violence that had made up such a great part of my life. I thought about how death and violence follow a man, lead him inexorably toward that one single inevitability, that one moment when his time arrives and he, too, must die in the manner that he has lived.

I drank deeply from my glass. He who lives by the sword, I thought.

When Chinee came back later the bottle of arrack was empty, and I lay face down on the sawdust-covered floor with my head cradled in my arms. He bent down to examine me, and when he saw my face he ran into the outer bar and put in an emergency call to the hospital.

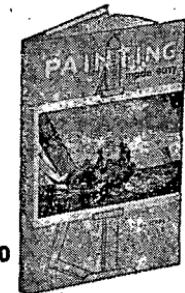
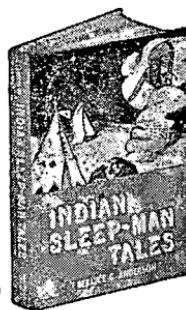
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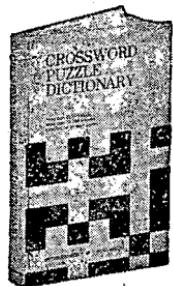
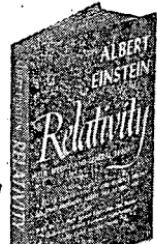
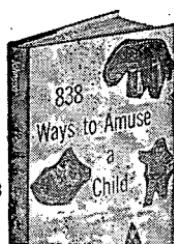
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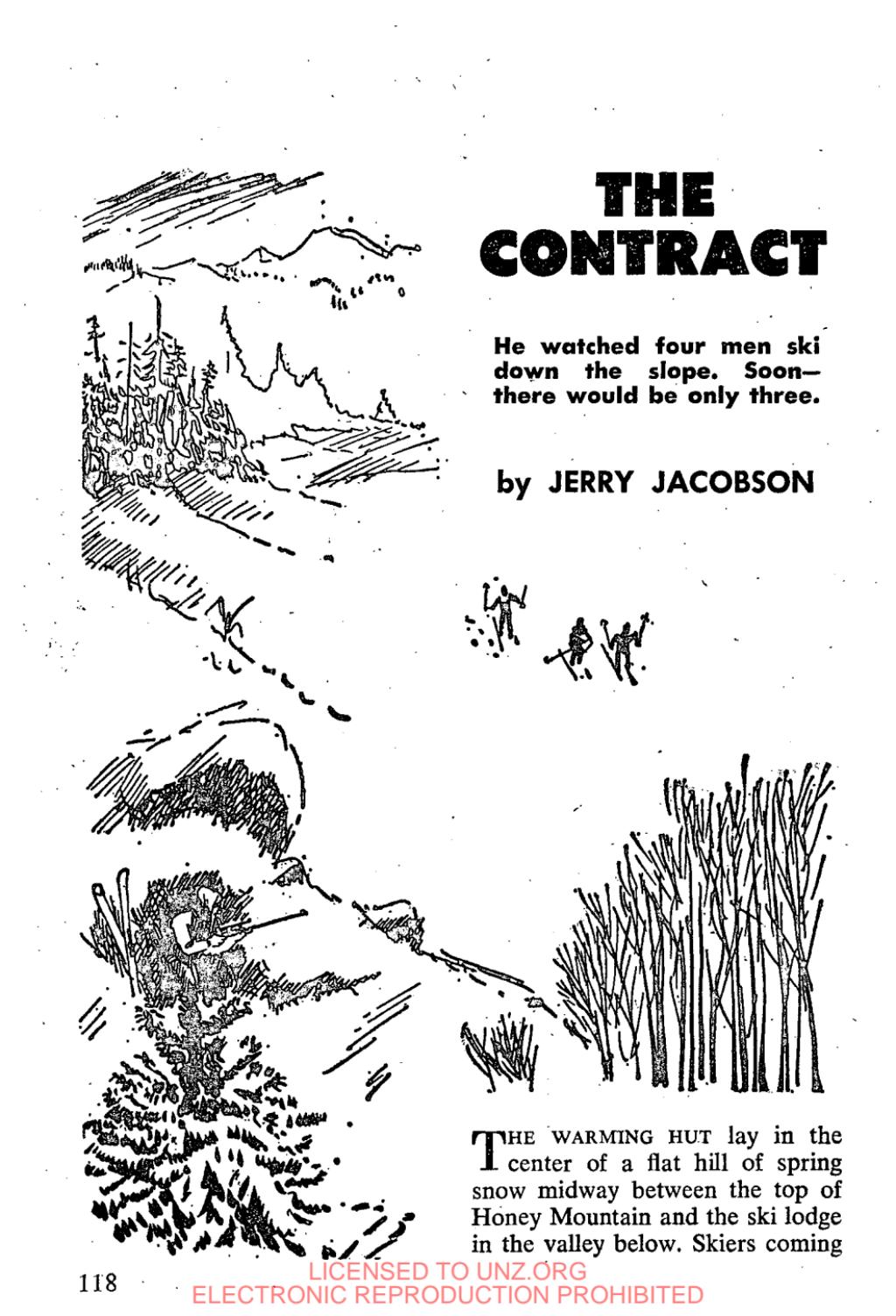
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THE CONTRACT

He watched four men ski down the slope. Soon—
there would be only three.

by JERRY JACOBSON

THE WARMING HUT lay in the center of a flat hill of spring snow midway between the top of Honey Mountain and the ski lodge in the valley below. Skiers coming

down one of the mountain's runs often stopped off at the hut to thaw out and take coffee or a snack before challenging the remainder of the downhill run.

The hut's two stories were chalet-like and low-eaved, fashioned of cedar and angled glass. On a clear day, with a powerful pair of binoculars, one could make out the faces of the skiers in the lodge a mile below.

Hahn came in off the hill and brushed the bottoms of his ski pants free of heavy, wet snow. He snapped his feet free of his bindings and stood watching a cluster of four skiers as they moved into serpentine action at the top of the mountain.

The man in the white parka was Buzas and the three others his bodyguards. There would be more bodyguards in the ski lodge in the valley, just as there probably would be some in the warming hut as well. For a minute Hahn watched as the four skiers fell into a protective pattern of 2-1-1 around Buzas. Buzas always took great care to be well protected.

Hahn jammed his skis and poles in a mound of old snow and went quickly into the warming hut. On the first floor there was a small bar and a sandwich counter and a large, open living room scattered with wood, lounge chairs. There was a fireplace crackling with thick-chunks of cedar. On the second floor was a coffee bar and a smaller

lounge and an observation deck of board railings and thick oak planks collared out over the snow on all four sides.

Hahn took off his ear-warmers and glasses and gloves and looked casually about the hut, picking out the things he had been briefed about. He saw the bar and the hallway leading to the observation deck and the short squad of pay telephones, not switchboard connected, halfway down.

He moved across the room to the bar and slipped into a leather chair. He sat quietly next to the two men he had caught looking at him through the bar's mirror when he came in.

He placed his things on the bar near his left elbow and ordered a hot-rum with an ounce of scotch. The man next to Hahn was looking at him, checking him over. He was stout, with a wrestler's thick neck and a fighter's short legs and he sat stiff-backed on his chair like a winning boxer waiting out the time between rounds.

"I saw you come in," the man said to Hahn. "Did you come in off the hill? Have you been skiing?"

"Yes, I have," Hahn told him. He had noticed the actions of the second man. He had gone outside, probably to check over Hahn's gear. He could search all day and not find the rifle.

"Is the altitude any bother?" said the squat man, making conversation.

"Not to me," Hahn said.

"And how is the snow? Is it to your liking?"

"I like it any way."

"What is it like today?"

"Spring snow," Hahn said.
"Mostly spring snow."

"That's the best kind, I hear," said the man, testing Hahn's authenticity as a skier.

"No," said Hahn, "it's not, actually. It makes a deep crust and is very treacherous."

"Of course. How stupid. I was thinking of another kind."

Hahn had a quick peek into the mirror and saw the squat man's partner coming back to the bar. He gave an almost imperceptible shake with his head, as if to say Hahn was all checked out and harmless. He sat down in the seat next to the squat man, looked at Hahn and smiled.

"I've been talking to an expert skier," said the squat one to his friend. "He is probably some champion or other and I don't even know it."

"Ahh," said the squat one's friend, nodding politely. "Mister—"

"Drake," said Hahn. "Paul Drake."

"Do you come here often, Mr. Drake?" asked the taller one.

"Yes, quite often," Hahn told him. "Once or twice a month during the entire season. I've been doing it for years."

"Then you must know this area

like the palm of your hand," said the taller one.

"Pretty well," Hahn said. "I've been down most of the forty-three runs and nearly all of the lifts."

"They have many lifts here?" asked the squat one.

"Yes, more than any other resort," Hahn told him. "Fifteen."

"Fifteen," repeated the taller one, with slight wonder. "I had no idea there were that many."

All at once the three men Hahn had seen on the hill came into the warming hut. Hahn was careful not to react to their appearance, but watched them in the bar mirror. One went immediately for the hallway leading to the observation deck. The other two stayed by the front door to the hut, obviously waiting for Buzas.

"Do you two do much skiing?" Hahn asked into the faces in the mirror.

"No not much," the squat one said, preoccupied.

"We just come up for the relaxation," said the other, also slightly preoccupied.

Hahn saw their eyes flick when Buzas appeared from outside. Buzas was wearing that white parka and underneath a black neck-warmer of heavy wool. It would be easy picking Buzas out in the lodge in the valley from the observation deck of the warming hut. The white sweater and the black neck-warmer would be unmistakable.

The two bodyguards across the room, with Buzas, went down the hallway to the sandwich bar, where Buzas devoured a sandwich and drank some coffee from a white, plastic cup. The two who had been sitting with Hahn at the bar had already left to join the cluster of men across the room.

In another minute the four bodyguards and Buzas were joined by the fifth bodyguard, who had checked upstairs. They all stood around Buzas like a shield. Only Buzas ate and drank. The others just clustered and kept a watch on the people and waited for him to finish his lunch.

When Buzas had finished eating and the six of them left the warming hut for the last leg of steep slope down to the lodge. Hahn waited at the bar another minute, then crossed the lounge area to the hallway where the pay telephones were located. He slipped into one of the cubicles, closed the door and dialed the number of one of the pay telephones in the valley lodge.

After two rings a voice answered. "Yes?"

"Hahn," Hahn said. "Belnick?"

"Belnick," said the voice. "Go ahead."

"They have just left the warming hut," Hahn reported, swiftly. "You should be able to see them coming down the slope. There are five plus Buzas."

"Good," said Belnick. "Then, I imagine you can do it any time you

wish. When do you plan to do it?"

"I want to do it right away," Hahn said. "As soon as possible. There is no telling when I might be found out."

"Good," said the voice. "Mr. Krause will be pleased. Where will you do it?"

"From the observation deck," Hahn said. "I think that is the best place."

"And you have your escape route all planned? If anyone were to find out who hired you it would be extremely embarrassing to Mr. Krause. And dangerous."

"I have that all worked out," Hahn told Belnick. "After it is over I plan to strike out cross-country on my skis. I have a map of all of the highways in this region. I will pick one not connected to the lodge, pretend to have car trouble and hitch a ride with someone. In a couple of hours I should be long gone."

"Excellent, excellent," came Belnick's voice.

"About my money for the contract," Hahn said.

"Don't worry about that, Mr. Hahn," Belnick said. "The money will be waiting for you in Chicago when you return."

"Good," Hahn said. "Then I'll see you in Chicago."

"In Chicago, Mr. Hahn," said Belnick. "Good-by. And good hunting."

"Good-by."

Hahn put up the phone, feeling



very pleased with his negotiations and went to the back door of the warming hut. When the slope was empty of skiers he went out the rear door and down into a gulley of snow, where he dug up the water-tight rucksack from its three-week old grave.

He went back inside and went up to the observation deck. For a moment he stood very quiet, looking down into the valley and the foursome of skiers diminishing in the distance. He sensed a certain danger on the observation platform.

It was entirely possible that someone would come out on to the observation deck for a breath of air or a look at the majestic view just as he was assembling the rifle or taking aim. That would be extremely embarrassing. A closer range seemed a preferable alternative —something around a thousand yards.

He scanned the slopes ahead and down toward the valley and spotted a likely looking side slope

two hundred yards north and a thousand yards down the hill. It seemed the perfect spot. With the scope-sight Buzas' chest would be a mile-wide at that distance. All he had to do was pull off his shot, disassemble the rifle and then strike out east across the snowy slopes. Smiling, he turned and started back downstairs to put on his skis.

"He's gone from the observation deck, now," said Belnick, the man who had talked with Hahn on the telephone. "Maybe something's gone wrong."

"Probably he does not like the distance," said Krause, from the bed. "Probably he wants to get closer. Give him all the time he needs."

The two men at the window and the one on the bed waited. Then Belnick said, "There he is. He's coming from the hut. Now, he's stopping and putting on his skis." He adjusted the binoculars slightly. "Now, he's moving off down the hill."

"Good," said Krause, "he's coming in for an easier shot. Buzas and the others should be in the lodge by now. Hahn will have a thousand good glimpses of him. It will be like looking down at fish in a barrel. Where is he now?"

"He has stopped on a small side slope about a thousand yards from the warming hut," Belnick announced. "He is off the main slope and there is no traffic. Now he is kneeling and removing his ruck-

sack. Now, he's assembling his rifle."

"Excellent," said Krause, not moving from the bed. "Good." He shifted his eyes toward the third man who stood off to one side of the big windows of sliding glass.

"You better get ready," he instructed.

The third man nodded grimly and walked to a spot on the wall where a rifle was leaning. He

snatched it up and slipped a shell into the breach.

"Wait until he has drawn his bead on Buzas and fired," Krause ordered from the bed. "That way the commotion will be perfect."

"He's kneeling to fire, now," said Belnick.

"From this distance only a blind man could miss," said the one with the rifle. "Push open the window."

Belnick opened the window.

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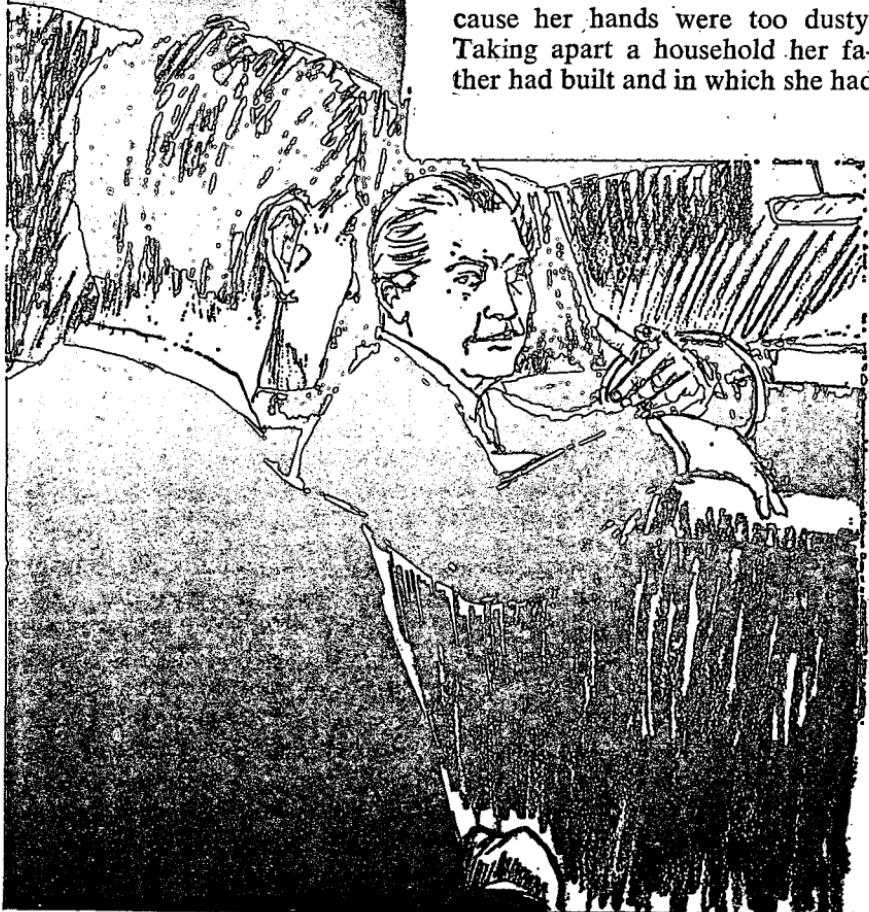
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THE SMALL HOUSE

Every man has his price, he knew. But—what was his?

by NORMAN DANIELS

ELLEN WARING wiped her forehead with her forearm because her hands were too dusty. Taking apart a household her father had built and in which she had



lived all of her twenty-eight years was not only a heartbreaking task, but a muscle-wrenching one as well.

Philip Waring came down the stairs in his tuxedo and she saw how much weight he'd lost since the last time he'd worn it. Still, he was a handsome man, with black hair and dark eyes and a firm, resolute manner.

It was difficult to remember that he was sick, trying to adjust to a radical change in his way of life. Philip's career had been meteoric. Six months after he was out of law school and two months after he was married, he'd been elected district attorney. He'd served three two-year terms, easily winning each time, and then that heart muscle gave warning it was still weak after a rheumatic fever attack during his boyhood years.

He resented very much his inability to even help with the moving, but more than that, he resented what he called a financial and professional disaster.

He was cheerful tonight however, and at the bottom of the steps he regarded her critically. "Don't come too close, madam. You're dusty."

"I hear," she said, "there's going to be one of those enormous cakes with a dancing girl inside."

"Bosh," he said, "the bar association wouldn't dare." She straightened his tie while he continued speaking. "You know,

there's little reason to hurry. The new owners don't take possession for five more days. We can leave any time. The doll house in Clearwater is waiting for us."

"Doll house," she said slowly and nodded in agreement. "That's a very good word for it."

"I didn't mean to insinuate that it's a cute, adorable place," he said grimly. "I referred only to its size. Three rooms. Not even a garage."

Ellen was glad that the big, sleek car pulled up in front of the house before he let his anger become too strong. She opened the door for him, kissed him on the cheek again and sent him on his way. Then she put on her glasses as she watched him get in beside the driver. The car moved from the curb.

Philip looked at the white-haired, handsome man who was driving.

"I don't seem to know you," he said.

"You don't, Mr. Waring."

Philip Waring settled back and wished the whole thing were over. He'd have to listen to a dozen speeches. There'd be jokes about how happy the local bar was, now that they once again had a chance to keep a client out of prison. They'd give him a present, maybe a watch. The committee never had shown much originality. He'd have to stand up and tell them good-by, with a speech long enough to have meaning and short enough not to be

boring. Then there'd be a hundred good-bys—as if he were headed for oblivion, with no chance to return.

Phil Waring had never before thought how efficiently a farewell banquet cut off a man's career. At his age of thirty-one, it was actually alarming.

The driver of the car suddenly made a turn on to a quiet residential street, pulled to the curb and shut off the motor and lights. Philip was startled enough to become apprehensive.

The driver said, "Don't be alarmed, Mr. Waring. I stopped here so we wouldn't be observed. I'm going to be extremely blunt. The bar committee didn't send this car. It's my own. I picked you up because it's essential that I talk to you."

"Well, it seems there's not much I can do to stop you," Waring said, "except to get out and walk and, frankly, I don't feel like it."

"I'm about to offer you a bribe, Mr. Waring," the driver said.

Philip shook his head. "You've got the wrong man. I'm retiring tomorrow. I couldn't fix a case even if I were so inclined."

"This one is to be tried tomorrow," the man said. "My name is John Selwyn."

"Selwyn?" Philip Waring tested the name on his memory. "I don't seem to remember—"

"You see how unimportant the case is?" Selwyn said. "My son

Steve was arrested two months ago. You must understand about Steve—"

"A knifing," Philip said. "At the country club, of all places. I'm not too familiar with the case, Mr. Selwyn, but I do seem to tie it in with the very prominent Selwyn family. Are you—"

"Yes," Selwyn said. "I'm a pronounced success in everything I've done—except raising my son."

"You must be desperate to resort to a thing like this," Philip Waring said. "I can't help you. I'm not even going to try the case. One of my assistants—"

"Waring," Selwyn said, and there was an edge of panic in his voice, "please listen to me."

"Don't make an offer, Mr. Selwyn. I'll be compelled to have you arrested, and I'd hate that. You may be acting in what you think are your best interests, but, believe me, bribery is one of the lowest forms of chicanery."

"I realize that," Selwyn said. "I hate what I'm doing. Waring, my wife died when Steve was three. I'm not young now. I wasn't young then, but she asked me to promise I'd take care of the boy."

"I made my mistakes with him early. By the time he was twelve, he was a first class little stinker and he grew steadily worse until that country club fiasco. Actually, it didn't amount to much. Steve and another boy got into a fight over a girl. Somebody had a knife

and in the scuffle, the other boy was stabbed. Not badly. He never was in any danger."

Philip glanced at his watch. "I haven't much time, but I'll say this, Mr. Selwyn. If my staff is going ahead with the prosecution of your son, they believe he should be punished and I will not interfere. I think that's about all, isn't it?"

"Steve has changed. Being arrested shocked all the deviltry out of him. I can handle him now. He'll become an asset to the community if he stays out of jail. The boy will—" Selwyn shook his head slowly. "I'm not being truthful. I think he'll be fine even if he does go to jail, but it's my own pride that compels me to do this.

"Perhaps also, a very fierce loyalty and devotion to a beautiful woman who has been dead a long time, but still lives with me as though she had never left my side. In short, I don't want her son to be castigated with such a thing as jail."

Phil Waring said, "I'd better get out and walk, Mr. Selwyn. So far, you've made no concrete offer and technically, the law hasn't been violated. We'll let it go at that."

"I'll violate it now. I'll give you fifty thousand dollars to let my son off. The amount is of little consequence. I could make it more—"

Philip sighed deeply. "My Selwyn, I'm not in the best of health, and I don't want to walk very far, so I'll ask your indulgence. Please

drive me to a taxi stand, or even a bus stop. But let me out of this car as soon as you can."

Selwyn didn't touch the starter key. "You've been an excellent public official, Mr. Waring, elected every two years no matter which ticket won. A fine record, a glorious one, but short and it paid so little. Now you're ill, a condition that requires rest and results in a severe curtailment of income. A condition brought on, let me point out, by your work in the last campaign and your devotion to your job. You're broke. What have you gained by wrecking your health?"

"A conscience that's unimpaired," Philip said, "I'm sorry, Mr. Selwyn. I'll do only one thing for you. I'll make no report of what's happened if you stop this nonsense and take me to the hotel where the banquet is being held."

Selwyn started the car. "Thank you for listening, at any rate," he said. "I doubted I'd reach you. In a way, I'm glad I didn't. However, the offer remains open."

Philip settled back in quiet anger. No matter how the evening turned out now, it was spoiled from the start. The car slid to the curb in front of the hotel and the doorman opened the door.

Selwyn placed a hand on Phil Waring's arm. "Please remember I'm just a father, trying to do what he thinks is best for his son."

Philip got out and walked into the hotel without looking back.

When he reached the Mirador Room, set aside for the banquet, he took a great deal of back-slapping, much ribbing and he made up his mind to enjoy himself.

A lot of hair was let down before the evening ended. Phil Waring wasn't sure whether he was angry or amused. He did appreciate the set of matched luggage. His own was beaten up, more from disuse than actual usage, and he could never have afforded anything as fine as this."

When he got home, Ellen was entranced with it. "Oh my! Isn't that beautiful! Darling, we needed those bags so."

"You should have heard the fool speeches," he said, and she noticed the hint of bitterness in his voice. "You'd think they were turning a chief justice out to pasture."

"You're tired," Ellen said. "Come sit down a moment."

He loosened his tie and collar while she moved things and found a place for him to sit on the divan.

"I was offered a bribe tonight," he said, half angrily.

Ellen frowned for a moment. "That cat! It wasn't the one from the committee, was it? The real one arrived five minutes later. I wondered."

"John Selwyn drove me, in his ten thousand dollar car. His son is being tried for aggravated assault with a deadly weapon tomorrow. He offered me fifty thousand to let the boy off."

"Piker," she said lightly. "I remember that—what was he, a gangster?—who offered you twice as much."

He nodded, the memory still fresh. "This is different. Except for the actual bribe, the man's attitude has some merit. The boy's mother died when he was a tot. Selwyn raised him on gold and platinum. The poor kid never had to worry about a thing. Also, as I recall it, the case isn't very serious."

Ellen looked startled. "Philip, you didn't accept?"

"No," he shook his head. "But I admit I thought about it later. There wouldn't be the slightest repercussion; nobody would be hurt. The boy might even be benefited, and we'd have enough money."

Ellen knew him so well. "Ordinarily, you wouldn't even bother with the details. You're angry about something, Philip."

"Yes," he said. "I admit I am. I sat at the head of the table tonight while they told me what a great guy I was. Ellen, I worked harder than any of those men and my income couldn't begin to compare with theirs."

"Remember that manslaughter case last month? The rich widow who drank too much and killed a man with her car? I fought her up and down the line because she was breaking her back, trying to get out of it. I got a conviction—her lawyer lost the case—and he got ten thousand dollars as his fee. Time

and again, that cropped up tonight. How much they'd made, even when I defeated them in court. It just isn't right, Ellen."

"You began thinking of the bribe," she said. "It's only natural. But, Phil, they're trying to do the right thing for us. The special pension will be forty-five hundred a year. We can live on that. Not extravagantly, but then we never have lived that way, so what's the loss? The main thing is you'll get better and we're going to be very happy."

Philip reached over to the side table and picked up two photos. One was of the house they'd bought. The little, brown-colored studio, one story place that didn't even have a porch or a garage. The other was the picture of a larger house, of eight rooms, with a green, level lawn, palm trees and an orange tree.

It was on a beautiful street and the property ran right down to the blue water of the Gulf of Mexico. The private beach looked sandy and white and there was even a small dock. The real estate agent clearly had little idea of what a public official made.

"This," Philip said with a note of longing, "is what we should have bought."

"Eight rooms?" Ellen sniffed contemptuously. "You see here, Mr. D.A., I'm retiring too, after a fashion. All my life I've rattled around this great big house and I'm

looking forward to three rooms. Small ones."

"They'll be small all right." He threw the pictures back on the table, and looked up at her. "I'm done in, sweet. I don't want to talk about small houses, or big houses, or anything else, if you don't mind."

He didn't sleep much, though, and Ellen knew he was thinking of that bribe. She was too. She had to admit it, the whole thing sounded so easy and safe, and they needed that kind of money so much. Illness could erase a bank account with alarming swiftness and the sickeningly small pension Philip had been promised was almost an insult.

When he finally drifted off into an uneasy sleep, she relaxed and thought about the wonderful life they'd had so far and the great and bright promise of much, much more. She didn't think about the bribe again until the following afternoon.

Philip Waring sent for the Selwyn file as soon as he reached the office. There wasn't a great mass of evidence. Even the witnesses for the State were none too strong. The boy who'd been cut had no desire to send the Selwyn kid to jail.

Perhaps there'd been some pressure exerted. The probation report didn't show it. Fifty thousand dollars, just to make a weak presentation of a case already so doubtful that no one in his right mind would be suspicious. Waring closed the file slowly and put his hand on it.

When his first assistant, Bob Manning, came into the office, he told him he was going to try the case.

"That stinker?" Manning asked in surprise. "Hostile witnesses, battery of defense lawyers, all the money in the world—"

"I know," Waring said. "Maybe I'll go out in a blaze of minor glory. I want to handle it, Bob. Keep me from moping around. And I expect you and Carol to drop in tonight. Okay?"

They were old friends. Bob Manning knew how he felt and so did Carol. They'd help speed the evening. Philip picked up the file, tucked it under his arm and walked out of the office. Halfway along the corridor to the courtroom, he saw John Selwyn standing alone, near one of the massive pillars. He looked small and unimportant and, most of all, forlorn. His eyes followed Phil Waring all the way to the courtroom door. Philip never glanced at the man.

By the middle of the afternoon he was finished and he'd made up his mind not to linger for any final farewells. He merely slipped out a side door and drove straight home.

Ellen was sputtering with indignation. "Sixty dollars. Two bedroom sets, most of the living room, and that wonderful old dining room set. Sixty dollars! Oh Phil, that's robbery. But the second hand dealer said it's old-fashioned and hard to sell."



They ate standing up in the kitchen, because the table and chairs had been sold and all they had was soup and some prepared biscuits, heated in the oven. Then there was ice cream and they made a great to-do about throwing the old dishes away, instead of washing them.

There was little left to be done. They'd started the work a month ago. Now that the second hand dealer had carted away most of the furniture, the house looked dull and depressing. The divan was a rundown, practically worthless item which they intended to discard. They had that to sit on, and a couple of wooden chairs, if Bob and Carol popped in, as they had promised.

The doorbell rang at seven. Ellen, still in her old housedress, gave a small cry of anguish, but she went to the door anyway. She returned in a moment and Phil, looking over the old books, glanced up inquisitively.

"Nobody there," she said. "But the bell did ring."

Philip slowly put down one of the books. "Yes," he said. "The bell rang."

He crossed the room and opened the door again. The package was against the wall, just outside the door. It was wrapped in brown paper and tied with ordinary string. He carried it into the living room and put it on the table, littered with more books, a disreputable looking brief case which was headed for the trash can, and two half packed cartons.

Ellen came to look over his shoulder. "Ah," she said, "more presents. From whom, Phil?"

He snapped the string easily and unwound the paper. There was no box, nothing except the neat stacks of currency, all in tens and twenties. Ellen stared at the money, looked up at him, and he nodded.

"The bribe," he said. "I handled the case in court and I lost."

"Oh, Phil," she cried out. "No—no, darling."

He took her hands tightly and led her to the divan. "Ellen, the case was weak to begin with, and there wasn't a friendly witness in the lot of them. Now hold on—don't say it, because what you're thinking isn't true. Darling, I never tried so hard, in my career, to convict anyone."

"But the Selwyn boy went free?"

"Yes. Ellen, it's very important that you believe me."

She looked at him in surprise. "Oh, I do, Phil. Of course I do. But Mr. Selwyn evidently thinks you lost the case purposely and—he's paid off as he promised."

"That's about it."

"What are we going to do now?" she asked. "Fifty thousand dollars!"

"It's not a bribe, not the way I construe it. I never earned it, but there it is, all ours. Selwyn won't even miss it."

"He's committed a very serious crime," she said.

"What crime? Bribery for what? I worked like a dog to convict that boy. I didn't pull a punch or refrain from using a single trick."

She said, "Are you, by any chance, setting up arguments as to why we should keep this money?"

"Certainly not," he said quickly. "You stated Selwyn had committed a crime. I said he had not, in the truest sense of the word."

"So long as Mr. Selwyn believes he had to pay off, then it's bribery," she insisted, with a tinge of anger.

"All right," his voice rose. "All right, Ellen. Let's not make a case out of it. But I'm going to say here and now—that's fifty thousand dollars without a string attached to it. Not one! We need that money so badly I can't begin to express it in words. This money, as it lies on that table now, belongs to us."

"Are you going to keep it?" she asked mildly, and he knew this kind of mildness in her. It was deceiving and it could break out in a

rash of angry words without further warning.

"I don't know," he said, smarting under the sarcasm he felt she was mentally showering upon him, irate at the meagre and unfair pension, at the lawyers who lost cases and got rich, while he won them and got poorer.

Then the doorbell rang and they knew it must be Bob and Carol. Ellen reached the table in four or five swift steps. She scooped up the money, wrapping the paper about it carelessly, and she stood for a moment, frantically looking for a place to hide it.

She had turned toward the wall where the table with the deep drawer, had been. The table was gone, of course. She put the money down, tilted a carton, spilling the books out of it. Then she placed the hastily wrapped package inside and covered the books.

"Let them in," she was breathing heavily. "It's all right to let them in now, Phil."

He gave her a curious look as he passed by. Carol and Bob came in and ribbed them about the appearance of the place and Ellen's bad housekeeping. They talked more than an hour. Once, there was an embarrassed moment when Carol picked up the picture of the larger house.

"Bob," she exclaimed, "look at this! Oh, Ellen, it's perfect. A beach, a private beach, and a dock—"

"Say," Manning looked up, "riparian rights must go with this property."

Ellen Waring showed them the other picture. "This is the one we bought, silly. The other costs thirty thousand dollars."

Carol covered up her mistake as well as she could, and they switched the talk to winter vacations and how Bob and Carol would be down. They left shortly after nine. Philip and Ellen went to the door with them. Ellen kissed Carol; Philip and Bob shook hands.

Bob Manning said, "I'm sorry you didn't win that case today, Phil. You certainly tried hard enough, and that impassioned summing up for the judge made you sound as if you were addressing a jury."

"You know how it is." Philip opened the door for them. "I thought I'd bow out with flying colors."

"Nobody could have won that case," Manning said.

Ellen went back inside. Waring watched them drive off. He felt a porch board sag slightly underfoot and made a mental note to put a couple of nails in it—until he remembered the house was no longer his. He felt a bit sad about it. The times he'd blessed it as a home, far outnumbered the times he'd cursed it as a back breaking monster that demanded all his spare time.

Ellen was seated on the divan when he went inside. He stood

looking down at her. She reached for his hand, touched it to her cheek. "Phil, I never doubted you tried to win. Please believe that."

"I do," he said, "but I'm also very happy that Bob brought it up."

"Philip, what are we going to do?" she asked. "I'm afraid. We need the money and, as you say, there are no strings attached."

"A while ago, you were mighty vehement against my wanting to keep it," he reminded her.

She got up and went to him quickly. "I know, darling, I know. But when Bob and Carol rang the bell, did you see me frantically hide the money? Oh, Phil, I want to keep it too. The way I acted proves it."

They sat down and, for a moment, neither spoke. Then Waring, choosing his words carefully, said, "I'm retired, for three or four years at least, according to the doctor, and the fault is not mine. I caught that initial cold, campaigning during last election. I went out on one wet, cold night after another, and I talked to thousands of people on every street corner in every large town. I wasn't campaigning only for myself. They called me a vote-getter. I went after votes for the whole ticket. And I won. For myself and the party.

"What have I got now, after all that work and sacrifice? Nothing! A junior lawyer in a big firm made more than I ever did, for only a fraction of the work. Now we've got fifty thousand. We need the

money. When you think of that miserly pension, I feel we've been cheated, after a fashion. Every single argument is in favor of our keeping the money."

"But what a way to end a brilliant career, Phil."

"Maybe it's a brilliant way to end a dull career, Ellen. Maybe we're looking at it from the wrong angle."

"I still remember those nights when you campaigned. I sat alone, half the time, not even knowing when you'd get back. Nobody, darling, ever worked so hard to put over an election."

"I never lost an election. I gave my office everything I had. Everything—" He stopped, thought about it a moment. Then he took both her hands in his. "Ellen, something just occurred to me. Before I tell you, I want your permission to send the money back."

She smiled and nodded. "That's what I really want you to do, my dear. I want it so much."

"It came to me, as I sat there belly-aching about all the work I did as D.A., that it was work I enjoyed. I wouldn't have traded it for any other, regardless of the pay. And this getting elected business—okay, I worked hard there too, but the voters never asked me to. I did the begging. I argued and implored them to elect me, because being elected was important to me.

"I wanted to be district attorney more than anything else in the world. And I won! They listened to

me, voted me in. The State, the city, and the voters owe me nothing. It's the other way around. I owe them everything. So what's the big beef? Do you see what I mean?"

"I do see," she said, and followed him to the table. She took the money out of the box and neatly rewrapped it. Philip picked up the phone and asked information for Selwyn's home number. One look around the room and he knew it was useless to try to find the phone book.

When Selwyn was on the other end of the wire, he said, "Mr. Selwyn, this is Philip Waring. A short time ago, someone delivered a package to me by mistake. It's on my front porch, where it was left, and I'd appreciate it if the package was picked up immediately."

"Very well," Selwyn said tightly.

"The fact is, Mr. Selwyn, I think a term in jail would help your son, and I did my level best to send him

there. However, the case was weak and I lost it but, I assure you, not through any effort on my part. I wanted to win that case because I classed it as the most important one in my career. Do you follow me?"

"I admire you," Selwyn said. "I've been sitting here, calling myself a fool. I not only tried to interfere with justice, but I foolishly did my best to wreck a man's life. I'm genuinely sorry, Mr. Waring."

"Just pick up the package," Waring said. "Good-by, sir."

Ellen finished tying the last knot and he placed the package outside the door where it had been left. Ellen waited in the hall and he took her in his arms.

"Riparian rights," she sniffed. "There are miles and miles of fine public beaches." She leaned back, while he held her, and smiled at him. "I bought a new bathing suit, Phil, if you don't whistle—"

He was very sure he would.

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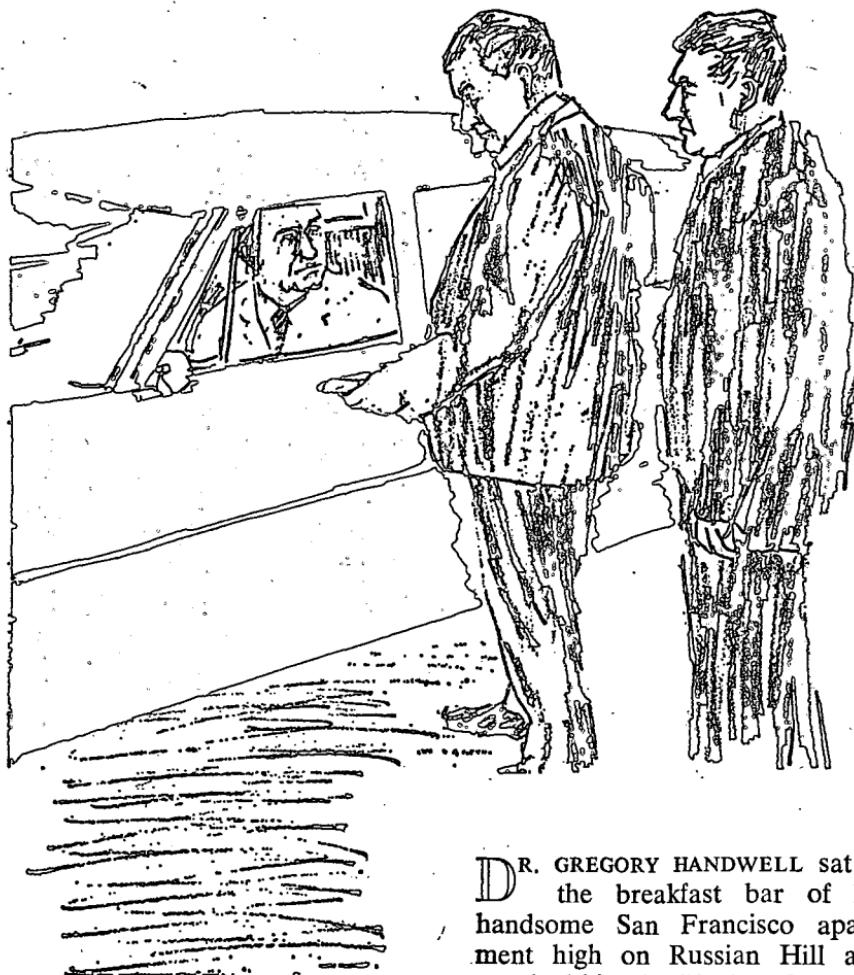
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*Beauty and danger went hand in hand
as Doc Gregory kept his mad tryst . . .*

Two Black Mantillas

by JAMES McKIMMEY



DR. GREGORY HANDWELL sat at the breakfast bar of his handsome San Francisco apartment high on Russian Hill and watched his wife lift the telephone.

"Dr. Handwell's residence."

Sinewy and small, Handwell perched attentive and eager, as eight o'clock sunshine poured through a window on his head, bald, except for a well-barbered fringe of graying brown hair around the base of his skull.

In her well-trained manner, Phyllis said, "I understand. You're at a convention at the Hilton, you found the doctor's name in the telephone directory and you are having rather severe abdominal pains."

Six inches taller than her husband, she had turned into a reasonably attractive matron who demonstrated the calm but confident demeanor of a wife who devoted herself entirely to her husband and his career. She had never, Handwell thought, been long in the sex department; but she had worked out well otherwise.

"The doctor," she said precisely, "will not arrive at his office until ten. But I would suggest, since you've indicated that you have eaten heavily about the city, that you take something to counter a possible acid. You might order an Alka Seltzer or a Bromo from room service. Then, should the pains persist, or in any way increase in intensity, please phone the number again. You're now talking to Mrs. Handwell. If the condition remains status quo until ten, please phone then, when the call will go into his office and the

doctor's receptionist can arrange an immediate appointment for you. Thank you for calling, sir."

He had listened to her handling of the call critically; he was satisfied. She had not actually attempted a true diagnosis, stepping out of position; yet she had given the extra warmth to the situation too many other medical men's wives were incapable of offering.

She started to hang up, then returned the telephone to her ear. He bent forward, watching intently, his ever-present curiosity making his pale-blue eyes glisten. She put her hand over the mouthpiece, turning to look at him in surprise. Then she hung up and walked back to the breakfast bar.

"What was that about?" he asked in a sharp, imperative tone.

"It was so strange."

"The man has acid."

"I don't mean that. These other voices came on!"

"Well, what did they say!" he demanded. Anything with a remotely mysterious twist had always fascinated him. He read crime accounts in the newspapers with hungry dedication; he consumed at least a dozen mystery novels every week.

"Two men. One said, 'Have you got the stuff?' And the other one said, 'Yeah. But I'm afraid there's been a tip.' The first one said, 'You're crazy. Who'd know? Where do I make the pick-up?' And the other said, 'In the parking

lot of the Stonestown Shopping Center, behind the Emporium, Friday afternoon, two o'clock.' " She stared at him with clear, guileless eyes.

"By God!" he said happily. "Don't you see?" He jabbed a forefinger at her excitedly. "Wires got crossed somewhere. Explanation: either the operator at the hotel plugged you into the conversation by mistake, or the automatic switch-over that rings the phone here before the doctor's office hours got tangled up. Take your choice." He nodded positively.

"Well, but what in the world were they talking about?" she asked, displaying that great innocence which was, in his estimation, her greatest asset.

"Narcotics!"

"They didn't say anything about that."

Handwell laughed, shaking his head.

"Stuff—that's narcotics. One man's a supplier. The other's a pusher, who'll sell it to the user. There may have been a tip off to the police. By God, Phyllis, I'm going to be there!"

"Oh, Greg," she said worriedly. "Isn't it dangerous?"

"You're precious, Phyllis. Don't ever change."

"Sometimes I think I don't know anything at all."

He looked at her with affection, thinking that he'd seen and heard just about all there was to see and

hear—an education he'd picked up when he'd started a small clinic for the poor in one of the worst slum sections of Tijuana, Mexico, two years ago.

It was merely a part-time philanthropy to which he gave a few days every month or so; but in that atmosphere, he'd faced the most bizarre elements of all time.

"Where in the world would they get narcotics anyway? Steal from a drug store? Or an office like yours?"

"Depends," he said knowingly. "If it's low-grade stuff, pep pills, even Percodan, sure, they could steal it. But that's not likely, because you can't count on stealing as a steady source. If it's the real stuff, heroin, it's got to be imported."

"But you can't prescribe *that*. It isn't supposed to be manufactured. Isn't that illegal, to import it?"

"Of course, it's illegal! That's what it's all about!"

"If it's imported, where in the world from?"

"Phyllis," he said. "When I'm at the clinic in Tijuana, I get junkies by the dozens. Where do you get the stuff? My God, you walk west down the street five blocks to a taco stand and ask for Guido. That's how difficult that is!"

"But inspection on the border—"

"Unless you're under suspicion, what do they do? Open the trunk. You don't carry junk in the trunk.

You carry it anywhere else, and you've got it made."

"Maybe you should tell the police, Greg."

"And spoil the adventure? No, sir! As soon as I see the pick-up made, I'll write down license numbers. Then finger them!"

"I'll be so worried. Just like when you go down and work in Tijuana. Yet—" Her direction drifted in that charming way it often did, "I do know you're performing something marvelous down there. When they wrote it up in the *Chronicle*, I was so proud of you.

"Did I tell you Bea phoned and said you were a regular Albert Schweitzer?"

"Well," Handwell said modestly, "not quite."

"I think so. But all of those people you treat—"

"Thieves, pushers, pimps, whores, deviates, addicts, killers—you name it, we get it. That's why I don't want you going down there with me. But I know how to handle myself." His voice suddenly firmed into commanding authority: "All right. Here're the instructions for the day." His forefinger jabbed; his eyes hardened. "When you drop me off downtown, have the car lubed. No oil, just lube. Got that?"

"Yes, sir," she replied quickly.

His forefinger jabbed again. "Abalone's in season. That's what I want for dinner. Remember you

don't overcook it like you did the last time!"

"No, sir."

"I want fresh French bread, with an avacado salad."

"Blue cheese dressing?"

"Certainly! And the rug by the front door needs cleaning."

"I'm sorry."

"There's an ash tray in the living room that hasn't been washed since it was used."

"I'll take care of it first thing, Greg."

He nodded abruptly. Strangers who had seen the performance for the first time often thought that Dr. Gregory Handwell was merely acting jocular. But Handwell wasn't kidding.

When Phyllis accompanied him to the garage to get into the new Cadillac, he was pleased to see that she was wearing the extremely expensive mantilla he'd had mailed to her from Tijuana two weeks ago. It was a fragile black veil, as delicate as a web, black, except for the name Carlota, which had been sewn in flaring red along one edge. The shop from which he'd ordered it, he thought, had screwed that up nicely.

"I don't know how they got that name business fouled up," he said. "If you want something done wrong, ask a Mexican."

"It doesn't matter a bit, Greg," she said smilingly, driving the large car down the steep decline, with the mantilla framing her face so

that she had an ethereal look. "It's beautiful and I adore it."

He leaned back, thinking that as soon as he'd met Carlota that evening in Tijuana and seen Phyllis' name in white on hers, he'd been certain that the one mailed to his wife bore Carlota's name in red.

Well, he thought, the splendid thing about Phyllis was her naivete. She disliked red, because, to her, it denoted everything she was not. Her favorite color was white, because it indicated purity. Yet, she'd accepted the error graciously, without suspicion.

He half-smiled, remembering how Carlota had used her mantilla as he'd driven her south to the Ensenada hotel: coyly, invitingly, sensuously—joking about the mistake in her broken English.

He could imagine her wearing it right now, walking past the clinic as she did daily, her stride arrogant, ample hips swinging, dark eyes flashing merrily. Well, when he'd got the idea to start the clinic, he'd known he would find a Carlota quickly. He had.

Phyllis drove the car smoothly through downtown traffic. Handwell relaxed. The Tijuana clinic served two purposes. It covered his time with Carlota.

And it gave his professional reputation the strength and dignity necessary for a man who, for years, had been skimming profits off the top before reporting his income to the federal government.



To Handwell, neither activity was a moral consideration. Carlota, who would never serve well as a doctor's wife, nevertheless was the exciting contrast that Handwell needed in his life. He, after all, gave Phyllis a very good and secure existence; he doubted if she had ever remotely suspected that he had such a romantic arrangement—and even if she had, she still would not risk her position by acknowledging the fact; she was a sensible woman who knew what was good for her.

As far as the failure to report his entire income, Handwell dismissed the matter on the basis that he did not believe in income tax anyway. The moral obligation there was squarely on the govern-

ment. His consideration had been simply to keep his visible level of living on a par with the income he did report.

Of course, if they ever looked carefully into the extent of his investments, he might be in trouble. But why would they do that with a man who lived in a manner above reproach? A man who was compared, even obliquely, to Albert Schweitzer?

Phyllis stopped the car in front of the medical building and said, "Have a good day, darling."

His forefinger jabbed again. "Don't forget the lube, no oil, abalone, fresh French bread and avocado salad. Let's try not to flunk out."

Anticipation for the adventure in the parking lot grew as the week progressed. Handwell's only real irritation came on Thursday, when he decided to go home for lunch. He had his receptionist telephone in order to instruct Phyllis precisely on the menu, but Phyllis had failed to answer. That night she'd explained that she'd decided to see a movie. He'd been reasonably stern with her, pointing out that in the future she should check it out with his office before doing something as foolishly unscheduled as that; he was convinced that she'd gotten it through her head.

That was forgotten early Friday afternoon, when he hurried down to the garage to climb into the car which he'd driven himself that

morning. The prospect of actually witnessing a real crime in process was energizing.

He even allowed himself the pleasure of believing that the cops may indeed have been tipped off, in which case he could witness an actual arrest. There was the possibility of resistance; he would like very much to see how it was handled.

At five minutes before two he was parked at the end of the lot, looking over the scattered cars. There were occupants seated in only two.

One was a woman, whom he dismissed. The other was a sallow-faced man, wearing an open-collared white shirt, who looked every inch a pusher.

The man was seated in a fading Pontiac. Handwell was absolutely putting his money on him when both doors of his Cadillac were opened. Uniformed policemen stood on either side. Handwell's head turned; he saw a patrol car parked behind his. A man wearing a business suit got out, looking at him with cool eyes.

"Do you want to step out please?"

"What's going on?" Handwell demanded, getting out.

The man opened a wallet to reveal his identification. "Tip. Cadillac, with this license. We could be wrong. We'll apologize if we are. May I see your identification, please?"

Feeling his anger mounting, trying to think through it clearly, he handed the man his billfold.

"Dr. Gregory Handwell. I read something about you, a couple of weeks ago. You've got that clinic in Tijuana, haven't you?"

One of the officers rounded the car. "It was in the glove compartment."

Handwell stared with shock at

the white substance against the delicate black fabric held in the officer's hand. Thursday, he thought. She hadn't gone to a movie. She'd flown to San Diego, crossed the border, and—

"What's that name on the scarf?" the second officer asked.

"That's not a scarf!" Handwell shouted pointlessly in his fury. "That's a mantilla!"

COMPLETE—NEXT MONTH—TWO EXCITING NOVELETS

DARK WEEKEND

A Story of Haunting Terror

by ROBERT COLBY

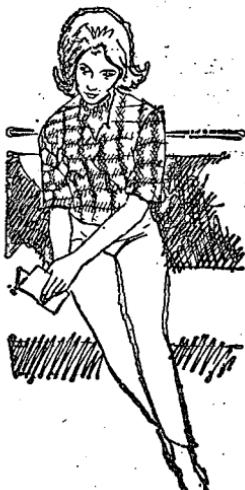
She was beautiful, lonely—and soon she would be very dead, unless I could somehow find the mad visitor whose mission was murder.

SUBMARINE FOR SALE

An Amazing Spy Novelet

by MAX VAN DER VEER

My boss had some fine assignments for me, Kevin Kar. Now—all I had to do was break up a revolution all myself—and come back alive to tell him about it!



A Fitting End

by

ELEANOR
LUCAS

Heel, chaser, he was everything I hated. Incidentally, he was also dead—with a bullet where his brain used to be . . .

THE REAL TEST, I thought, will be if he recognizes me. I adjusted the heavy wig and made sure my eye liner hadn't smeared. In the small mirror I could hardly recognize my own face. The pale lipstick, too, helped to change the contours. Satisfied, I pushed open the door to the apartment and went in. I knew it would be open. The bum always left it unlocked until the milk was delivered.

Herbert Corwin whirled, surprised, and then seeing it was a woman, smiled.

"Aren't you in the wrong apartment?" he asked.

"I'm selling cosmetics," I answered in the hoarse voice I had practiced.

He laughed. "I don't need any."

"Let me give you a free sample, anyway," I said, opening my black sample case. I knew now my disguise was perfect.

He waited, a smirk on his handsome face. I could hardly look at it, it disgusted me so. As deftly as I could with my kid gloves, I picked the gun out from among the jars, pointed it and fired. There was a soft "Pptt" through the silencer.

Herbert Corwin fell on the drab, gray carpet.

I walked over to the desk and sat down at the telephone. "I want to report a murder," I said.

The newspapers carried a full account. Herbert Corwin found shot in "love nest". Murderer seen

fleeing scene of crime. Body discovered by door-to-door cosmetics saleswoman, Vanessa Everly, who gave a full description of the fleeing woman.

I was rather proud of that part.

The description I had given of his wife was accurate right down to her freckles, her ruddy complexion and her glasses. I mentioned her straight brown hair, cut short and rather mannish. There could be no mistaking Alice Corwin from that description.

I was careful, too, not to tell more than I might conceivably have been able to see had Alice Corwin actually been running away from the apartment, as I said she was. I was positive that the police hadn't the faintest idea that I made the whole thing up.

And the delicious part of it is that Alice Corwin was not at home when the police came to question her. She drove up in her Chevy station wagon and was unloading grocery bags from the back when they came around to the garage and saw her.

It must have given them quite a thrill to see the very woman they had just heard described in such detail. She wasn't wearing a hat, and her short straight hair was somewhat mussed from worming the sacks out of the car.

She denied knowing anything at all about the apartment or about her husband's love affair, but I don't think they believed her. Her-

bert Corwin has been in too many sordid messes involving other women, generally well-publicized squabbles.

The identity of the current lady love was not known. The apartment was rented out to a Mrs. Carl Hollingsworth, but it was certain that that was not her real name.

The police searched the apartment thoroughly, but could not find the gun, nor was it found in a search of the Corwin house. Alice Corwin's statement that she was shopping in a super-market had been checked, but as is so often the case in those large, impersonal markets, she saw no one she knew who might be able to identify her, so she has no real alibi.

There is no doubt that she had motive enough and to spare.

Suddenly developments took a new turn then . . . Vanessa Everly disappeared. Her picture has been published in the newspapers again, with an appeal to anyone who can identify her. I am confident no one can. The address I gave the police was, of course, a phony, and when they inquired for Vanessa Everly at the Appleton Cosmetics Company, they were told most indignantly that no one by that name or description had ever been associated with them.

The report is that the police now believe Vanessa Everly to be the murderer of Herbert Corwin, but the problem remains, who is she?

I have no fears whatsoever

about Vanessa Everly's being found. I studied the picture in the paper carefully. I was pleased with my disguise. No one could possibly recognize me. Even the lines of my face looked different.

The police have again demonstrated their remarkable efficiency. With very little to go on, they have uncovered the identity of Mrs. Carl Hollingsworth, the woman to whom the apartment had been rented.

The papers say she is Loreen Mulford, the wife of a prominent local businessman. There were several pictures of her, hiding her face from the camera, but you could see that she was a real beauty. Her heavy auburn hair couldn't be hidden by the suede purse she held up to shield her, nor could her lovely figure.

So the search was on at the Mulfords. The whole house was turned nearly upside down, with Mr. Mulford threatening to sue, and Loreen Mulford denying everything, hysterically following them around, begging them to leave her alone.

They found the evidence they were looking for, all right. Stuffed back of an old wheelbarrow in the Mulford's garage, they found a large cardboard box chock-full of evidence. There was a black sample case full of cosmetics; there was a black wig, and best of all, in the false bottom of the sample case, they found the murder weapon, the gun that had killed

Herbert Corwin. I took care of those little details, all right.

So everything fell into place.

Loreen Mulford, they decided, was Vanessa Everly. Her face disguised with heavy make-up, and a black wig on her head, she had gone to the apartment she shared with Herbert Corwin, and shot him. After reporting the murder, she had told the police a story of seeing a woman running away from the scene of the crime, and had furthered the lie by involving the wife of the dead man.

A tidy case, wouldn't you say?

The police thought so, just as I had planned they would when I planted the evidence in the Mulford's garage. I had already placed the grocery bags in my station wagon, and, with my face scrubbed, I was back in my own identity when the police came to tell me my husband had been shot.

Everything was going so well.

Then someone got the bright idea of trying the wig on Loreen's head.

And it didn't fit!

That wig wouldn't begin to go on over Loreen's thick auburn hair. It perched on top of her head, and no amount of tugging would bring it down, short of ripping it.

Then they tried it on me.

I fought them! Oh, I fought them! But they got it on me anyway. And it slid so easily over my short, mannish hair cut, just as if it had been designed for me.

continued from Back Cover

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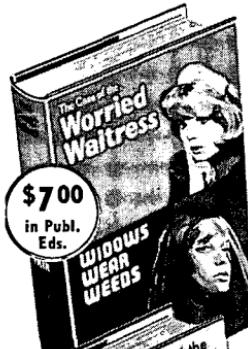


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